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# RELIGION, RATIONALITY AND COMMUNITY

*Sacred and secular in the thought of Hegel  
and his critics*

*by*

R. GASCOIGNE



MARTINUS NIJHOFF PUBLISHERS

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ROBERT GASCOIGNE

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*To Yvonne*

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## INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to examine the relationships between religious belief and the humanism of the Enlightenment in the philosophy of Hegel and of a group of thinkers who related to his thought in various ways during the 1840's. It begins with a study of the ways in which Hegel attempted to evolve a genuinely Christian humanism by his demonstration that the modern understanding of man as a free and rational subject derived its strength and validity from the union of God and human existence in the incarnation. The rest of this study is concerned with two different forms of opposition to Hegel: first, the critical discipleship of the Young Hegelians and Moses Hess, who insisted that Hegel's notion of Christian humanism was false because religious belief was necessarily inimical to a clear consciousness of social evil and the determination to abolish it; second, the religious opposition to the Enlightenment in the thought of Schelling and Kierkegaard, which emphasized God's transcendence to human reason and the insignificance of secular history. In the years leading up to the revolution of 1848, Hegel's synthesis was rejected in favour of the assertion of atheistic humanism or religious otherworldliness.

Chapter One, after discussing the young Hegel's critique of the social and political effects of Christianity, examines the union of religious belief, speculative philosophy and the rational state in Hegel's mature system. The development of this system was motivated by the need to come to terms with the contradictory inheritance of Christianity on the one hand and notions of humanist self-determination and rational autonomy on the other. This contradiction was expressed politically by the opposition between the ideas and institutions of the French Revolution and those of the Holy Roman Empire, and culturally in the antipathy of German Romanticism to the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment. Hegel's philosophy sought to grasp the truths generated by the clash of the Christian foundations of European culture with the modern ideas which saw in Christianity a powerful source of human weakness and alienation. In his philosophy these problems were treated in a way which his successors were forced to accept as the starting-point for their own work: whether through critical support or violent opposition they attempted to come to terms with the problem of the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment, and all its political and cultural consequences, by marking out their own relationship to Hegel.

Chapters Two and Three are concerned with the critique of Hegel's religious and political synthesis from the point of view of an atheistic humanism. In Chapter Two the intellectual development of Bruno Bauer is discussed, with particular emphasis on his attempt to show that Hegel's philosophy, if brought rigorously to its conclusions, implied the creative sovereignty of the human mind and the non-existence of any infinite spirit which could be distinguished from it. For Bauer, although religious ideas had played an important historical role as the first form of a universal concept of man, their contemporary effect was to make impossible any free development of reason. Religion was the sanctification of human weakness and religion, rather than social or political structures, must be the chief object of rational criticism. The chapter concludes by contrasting Bauer's concept of religious alienation with that of Feuerbach. Chapter Three examines the philosophies of political and social action which sought to build on the critique of religion made by Bauer and Feuerbach. Arnold Ruge attempted to develop a democratic political theory by criticizing Hegel's connections between political forms, such as the monarch and the system of estates, and the necessities of the absolute. The free practice of politics could, for Ruge, realize the spiritual ideals that Hegel had restricted to art, philosophy and religion. Religion, for Ruge, was not a relationship to the divine, but rather a unique ethical passion which should be directed towards political goals. For Moses Hess, the thought of the Young Hegelians must be applied to the drastic injustices of social life, revealing the alienation of man from his own productive activity through the capitalist control of industry. Religious ideas would, for Hess, find their true content only in the fulfilment of the human essence in a future society of brotherhood, made possible by ethical insight and determination.

Chapters Four and Five deal with a very different group of criticisms of Hegel. While Hess and the Young Hegelians rejected Hegel's union of religion and the free subject from the point of view of an atheistic humanism, the late Schelling and Kierkegaard castigated his neglect of religious transcendence, his exaggerated claims for speculative reason and his illusion that the human subject could find realization in the political order. Chapter Four begins with an examination of Schellings's critique of Hegel's absolute idealism from the point of view of a 'positive' philosophy of religion. Only a receptivity to the historical structure of religious experience as set forth in mythology and revelation could show the truly divine character of the absolute, which must remain no more than conceptual possibility in Hegel's system of pure reason. For Schelling, the secular world was not, as Hegel had imagined, the arena for the spiritual subject's self-realization, but rather the world of man's fallen nature. Chapter Five examines Kierke-

gaard's assertion of the transcendence of God to human reason and human history and his attack on the Hegelian philosophy of immanence. For Kierkegaard, Christian faith was the relationship of an individual in 'passionate inwardness' to a God who had intervened in human history only in an 'instant'. Kierkegaard rejected completely Hegel's thesis that the human subjectivity which derived from Christian belief had important and fruitful consequences in the shaping of political life. Both the social conservatism of 'Christendom' and contemporary liberalism were guilty, for Kierkegaard, of identifying Christian existence with secular civilization.

The failure of Hegel's attempt to create the intellectual conditions for an age in which Christianity and the Enlightenment would live at peace together can be seen in the thought of his immediate successors: their reaction to Hegel, and to the social and political crisis of their age, helped to strengthen the opposition between Christianity and the social and political consequences of the Enlightenment for a long time to come. Hegel's mature synthesis was at a point of tension between his own youth and the thought of his radical disciples. The Young Hegelians re-affirmed many of the themes of the young Hegel's unpublished works, asserting the superiority of Greek thought over Jewish faith, of human self-determination over devotion to a transcendent God. Their thought dissolved the synthesis of the mature Hegel by abstracting its emphasis on the free work of human subjectivity from the religious context that gave it stability and meaning.

By the end of the 1830's, with the publication of the works of Strauss and Cieszkowski and the appearance of the *Hallische Jahrbücher*, the opposition between the Young and Old Hegelians had become clear. It was in the 1840's, in the years leading up to the revolution of 1848, that the Young Hegelians published all their important works. In 1841, the aging Schelling was called to Berlin by the Prussian government and he remained there long enough to experience the revolution. Kierkegaard, seeking intellectual stimulus and relief from the unhappiness of his broken engagement, came to Berlin to hear Schelling: most of his works, too, were published during the 1840's, and his reflections on politics and society centred on the upheavals of 1848. The combined crisis of industrial and political revolution led to the articulation of a group of political, philosophical and religious ideas which rejected Hegel's synthesis from diametrically opposed standpoints. Hegel's philosophical resignation gave way to an intellectual radicalism which was intensified by the premonition of a coming storm. The understanding of this situation, of its potential for good or evil, was expressed for the most part in the recommendation of exclusive commitment: the last years of the Restoration and the dislocating beginnings of industrialization in Germany went hand in hand with an intellectual preference



for eschatological language and utopian solutions. The harmony between participation in the socio-political community and worship of the divine that Hegel had urged was rejected in favour of radical commitment either to the world-historical task of realizing the ideals of philosophy in a practical realm of freedom and justice or to the priority of religious truth and the affirmation of the sinful and corrupted character of the secular world.

The political conditions that were the background to Hegel's political theory were the enlightened bureaucracy of vom Stein and Hardenberg and the union of monarch and people in the aftermath of the war against the French. It was the revival of political romanticism in the 1840's, focussing on the young Friedrich Wilhelm IV, which helped to intensify the opposition between those who sought to radicalize Hegel's philosophy and those who saw the reign of the new king as the possibility of a genuine restoration of Christendom. Whereas Hegel had hoped that the French revolution would be the last great cataclysm of European society, his disciples and critics in the 1840's saw that its ideas and example would result in an age of ever increasing turmoil. For some, this suggested the possibility of a revolution that would at last introduce men to the peace and security of genuine freedom and justice, a society that could look back on the past as a long nightmare of 'pre-history'. For others, these revolutions were the direct result of atheism, the sign of man's delusion that he was capable of determining his own fate without reference to divine will. This polarization of ideas perpetuated the mutual estrangement of Christianity and the Enlightenment. The thinkers of the 1840's challenged Hegel by insisting that his own philosophy had failed to do justice both to the mysteries of faith and to the discontinuities between a given social ethos and moral ideals. Yet they did not realize that their own thought remained inevitably one-sided in its failure to address itself to the problem that Hegel had struggled to resolve: the relationship between religion and community, worship and social action, grace and human freedom.

## CHAPTER 1

## RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL

1. THE OPPOSITION OF CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNITY  
IN HEGEL'S EARLY WRITINGS

The fundamental theme of Hegel's youthful writings is the attempt to discover the spiritual basis for authentic human community, conceived of as a revival of the immediate and beautiful unity of the Greek *polis*. Living in a Germany which still suffered from the backwardness imposed by the wars of religion, whose political institutions functioned to guarantee the atomistic rights of petty oligarchies rather than to develop any national political culture, Hegel saw the *polis* as a political form in which human activity in every sphere of cultural and economic life reflected a dedication to the spiritual value of the community itself, free of private interests and undisturbed by the imposition of a religious transcendence that could relate only to the personal soul. In Germany religion had acted to destroy political unity and to abolish ethical behaviour by enshrining specific dogma as the ultimate norm of each religious community's allegiance: the only alternative to endless conflict had been to abandon national statehood by institutionalizing religious differences in a welter of small states.<sup>1</sup> For Hegel, then, the task of reviving humane community depended fundamentally on developing a religious life that gave a spiritual basis to humane values rather than imposing transcendent, divisive norms. Political community could only be achieved through free rationality and the religion that inspired it must purge itself of given or 'positive' dogma, becoming a source of pure ethical values.

Hegel's earliest discussion of religion in his *Fragmente über Volksreligion und Christentum* (1793–4) owes much to the German enlightenment's critique of the irrationality of religious differences: Lessing's use of the legend of the three rings in *Nathan der Weise* is approvingly quoted. Yet his attempt to understand the role of religion in the ancient republics goes further than the *Aufklärung* ideal of deism as a creed of rational principles. Hegel notes that popular religion develops forms related to the emotion and behaviour of a particular historical group: only a religion relevant to the cultural level and practical needs of a people can realize the warm ethical potential that is

universal. The *Aufklärung's* disdain for the historical evolution of religion, the sense of rational superiority over superstition and faith – an insensitivity of which Hume and Voltaire were more guilty than Hegel's mentor Lessing – is criticized by Hegel as a failure to appreciate the essence of religion, which is a response of the heart to immediate, human ethical situations and as such related to the historical community in which these situations occur.

For Hegel, a true *Volksreligion* must have three elements: firstly, it must be based on universal reason, secondly, be able to satisfy fantasy, feeling and sensuousness, and thirdly, meet the needs of public life, of the unifying actions of the state.<sup>2</sup> Religion should not remain belief in an other-worldly God, but must become the source of ethical life, permeating the real world, and even negating its own specifically transcendent character in order to liberate the human spirit to realize its potential, unconscious of any external obligation or reward. Religion must be eliminated as an objective, positive force, distracting man from inner-worldly activity and setting up its own self-serving institutions with the inevitable accretion of a priestly caste. Its true role is to inspire ethical life, to become a well-spring of moral values strong enough to give the natural world a spiritual status of its own and to concentrate men's attention on the immediate divinity of the political community. Hegel set himself the task of discovering 'what kind of institutions are necessary, so that the teachings and strength of religion are woven into the fabric of human feelings, are united with the central motivations of action and show themselves to be living and effective – so that religion may become fully subjective; when this is so, then religion will no longer express itself merely through hands joined in prayer or through genuflection and the submission of the heart before what is holy, but will rather spread its influence over all branches of human inclination (without the soul being explicitly aware of it) and will be effective, in an indirect and subtle manner, everywhere. Religion will, so to speak, work in a self-negating way, associating itself with the happy pleasures of human joy, the carrying out of sublime deeds and the practice of the gentler virtues of human charity; even though religion will have no direct effect, it will have an all the more refined influence because it will at least allow the soul to work freely and openly, without crippling its activity'.<sup>3</sup>

For the young Hegel, Christianity was not the historical foundation of modern notions of freedom and human dignity. Man has philosophy to thank, and not the priests, that intolerance and obscurantism have been overcome. There is no evidence that the sudden growth of scientific knowledge was stimulated by a change in Christian teaching – on the contrary, the sciences were always held back by theology. The con-

trast of Christianity with Greek religion was already clear in the reactions of the disciples to Jesus, their expectations of worldly, political action from him and their transformation of his teachings into institutionalized practices. Socrates, by contrast, discourages all personal reverence. The crucial difference was that his teachings could not lend themselves to the formation of dogma and the justification of a hierarchical elite. This was because they were no more than the development of the truth that lay in every man: 'he developed concepts out of the soul of man, which were present there and which needed nothing more than a midwife.'<sup>4</sup> The social consequences of the two different teachings were clear: worship of the transcendent Father led to sectarian dogmatism, while the explication of human consciousness encouraged freedom and equality. When a people has developed a mode of public worship which satisfies fantasy and reason, and which is conceived as a unified social task, then it will not be tempted to forfeit its independence to a priestly hierarchy or to use religious phrases and images that were relevant and meaningful only in remote times and places.

Jesus' command to the rich man to give all his possessions to the poor showed how little his teaching of individual perfection could be made the ethical foundation of society. Christianity has not only failed to act as a reforming influence upon social and political life but has actually lagged behind it. Many of Christ's commandments, if acted out according to the letter, would destroy the legal foundations of society and render its survival impossible: 'it is clear . . . that the teachings and principles of Jesus were suited only for the formation of individuals and were directed to that purpose.'<sup>5</sup> The laws and practices of the tiny religious community have little relevance to the ethical life of the state. Christianity must be judged according to the highest purpose of religion, which for the young Hegel is to provide a strong foundation for social ethics. Christianity has set up the goal of heavenly bliss over the intrinsic worth of moral behaviour. Its doctrine of reward and punishment renders man incapable of leading a full and satisfying life in the world, focussing all his attention on the heavenly future. Socrates, by contrast, offers us an example of virtue that is attainable by our own human powers, avoiding the Christian prostration of man to grace.

Hegel's *Fragmente* constantly return to the problem of evolving a *Volksreligion* that will satisfy all of man's rational, emotional, aesthetic and social faculties. Such a religion must be judged in the light of its doctrines, its ceremonies, and its influence on society. Religion is the key to man's self-understanding, and its characteristics are necessarily shared by all the other aspects of a society's culture:

‘the spirit of a people, their history, religion and degree of political freedom cannot be considered in isolation neither in their influence on each other nor in terms of their own characteristics: they are woven together in a single cord.’<sup>6</sup>

When these links of religion to general culture are examined, Christianity, for the young Hegel, is found wanting. Its effect on European history has been to create political despotism and personal privation, while Greek religion fostered both social unity and psychic health. The Greek has self-confidence in the consciousness of his own strength and freedom, which fortified him against the harshness of life:

‘the brazen bond of need chained him, too, to mother earth, but, through his own feeling and imagination, he re-worked, refined and beautified it, decked it with roses with the aid of the Graces, so that he felt his chains to be his own work, a part of himself.’<sup>7</sup>

A religion can become the unifying faith of a nation only if its doctrines are simple and accord with universal reason – yet Christianity preaches complex dogma and subordinates moral needs to them. Christianity manifestly depends on historical events, which of their nature are not explicable in terms of universal reason, and yet it insists that salvation depends on belief in these events. The Christian doctrine of the corruption of human nature is contradicted in those societies which have enjoyed good government, the political and social conditions for human perfectibility.

For the young Hegel, the attraction of Christianity for the ancient world could be explained by the decline of the masses’ inner confidence, a readiness to accept an external system of rewards and punishments. While the republican of the classical age had offered up life and limb for the *polis* out of spontaneous duty, without expectation of an other-worldly reward, the Christian could not act in the world without hope of future happiness. Public virtue disappeared, giving way to the hope for personal salvation. For Hegel, the contemporary need was for a humanism that could correct the Christian doctrine of the corruption of human nature, reclaiming all those virtues that it had projected onto the figure of Jesus, so that

‘we recover what is beautiful in human nature, which we ourselves have put into that alien individual, while we retained everything loathsome that it is capable of – when we once more joyfully recognize it as our own work, when we reappropriate it and learn to feel self-respect, while we formerly thought only that which is worthy of contempt to be our own.’<sup>8</sup>

If human self-understanding could be transformed in this way, it must have a profound effect on social and political life. The concentration on the values of the private life must wane, and constitutions that do

no more than guarantee personal safety and private property would no longer be considered sufficient. Human dignity must replace humility and servility in both religion and politics.

The mutual relationship of religious forms and socio-political life becomes even more clear in Hegel's discussion of the decline of pagan religion in the additions to his *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* (1795–6). Germany's lack of a national mythology seemed to Hegel to be linked to its failure to develop a common political culture. The ancient pagans, however, had possessed a deeply satisfying mythology that had inspired all their surpassing artistic creations and given a spiritual content to political life.<sup>9</sup> How could it be that these native and traditional religions, that had for so long expressed the feelings attached to every aspect of popular life, could decline in the face of foreign and other-worldly Christianity? Such a change must 'have been preceded by a still and secret revolution in the spirit of the age.'<sup>10</sup> As the religions of free republics the Greek and Roman religions lost their significance as freedom itself was lost. Increasing wealth and the accumulation of personal political power destroyed the relative economic and social equality of the republic. Loss of freedom resulted in political apathy and the dissolution of the public interest. Political rights disappeared leaving only the right to private property, which became the individual's entire world. The loss of identification with the social whole isolated the individual in a subjectivity open to death, which only now became frightening.

It was in this world of political misery and private greed that Christianity flourished. The ideals that had formerly been realized in man's will and through his own powers were made attributes of the Christian God. The realization of these ideals now depended simply on the grace of God, for which man could only wish and pray: the hope of freedom was left to the action of the divine and the end of the world. The doctrine of original sin condemned any belief in man's potential to create his own world. God became objectified, as the totally other, and so the positive demands of religion began to have no necessary link with humane ethical life, which in any case had become impossible in the secular sphere. The cult of subjective piety and the pursuit of private aims went hand-in-hand. The death of spontaneous civil life meant that any public actions that did take place could only be aroused by force and direction from above. The identification of the individual with the higher reality of the *polis*, whose life he participated in creating, and whose unity and wholly satisfying existence made superfluous any desire for personal immortality, only gave way to other-worldliness when concrete social freedom had become impossible:

'Cato turned to Plato's *Phaedo* only when his world, his republic, hitherto the highest order of things in his eyes, had been destroyed; at that point only did he take flight to a higher order still.'<sup>11</sup>

Christianity, then, in contrast to the pagan religions, became a religion of positive dogma rather than of ethical life. Hegel's major concern in *Die Positivität der christlichen Religion* was to show how Jesus' original teaching of moral humanism was transformed into a positive religion. Jesus needed to speak of himself as the Son of God in order to give the weight of divine authority to his attack on Jewish legalism, but this itself was the fatal beginning of a new positivity, since, because of his association with the Messiah and the heroic manner of his death, the faith of his disciples was concentrated on his person rather than on the moral enlightenment of his teaching. The ethical content of his work disappeared since his precepts were obeyed out of respect for his authority rather than through insight into their intrinsic truth. The beginning of positivity within Christianity had been the exclusiveness of Jesus' small group of disciples, which rapidly transformed itself into a sect. For Hegel, Socrates' ethical teaching escaped the fate of positive religion because his disciples were never cut off from the concrete republican life of society. Their involvement in independent relationships made it impossible for them to depend on their master alone, or to consider his teachings as sacred because of his authority.<sup>12</sup> Jesus' disciples had no such identification with community: their exclusive attachment to Jesus perverted the universality of his ethics into a sectarian spirit, whose love was directed only within the group. Because the universal ethical inspiration of Jesus had been weakened, the growth of the sect into a Church could not preserve the communal love of its infancy: sharing of goods disappeared, human equality was alienated to the next world, and the love-feast of companions at the Last Supper became objectified into a dogmatic mystery.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike the philosophical sects of the ancients, the Christian church soon began to demand the sacrifice of free decision-making in favour of positive laws of its own invention, which often acted in contradiction to the incipient rational universality of the state. The attempt of the churches to subject men to their own positive power resulted in the state's abandonment of its right and duty to foster the free development of young minds, helping to destroy secularity altogether by making civil rights dependent on religious beliefs.<sup>14</sup> The ultimate consequence of religious positivity was to abolish every form of social rationality by demanding total allegiance to a sectarian institution opposed to the development of an ethical universality that could challenge its cultivation of the spirit as other-worldly and mysterious:

'The basic error which lies at the heart of the whole system of a church is this under-estimation of each capability of the human spirit, especially of reason, the first among them; and if reason is undervalued by the system of the church, then this system is nothing other than systematic contempt for man.'<sup>15</sup>

Hegel's emphasis on the need for a *Volksreligion* to satisfy both reason and feeling was taken up once more in the fragments from 1796 or 1797 that have been given the title *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (*The oldest systematic programme of German Idealism*). In this unrestrained evocation of a future humanism, Hegel rejects the state as a mechanism that suppresses human freedom, as well as all religious transcendence, in favour of the 'absolute freedom of all those spirits, who carry the world of the intellect in themselves and who seek neither God nor immortality outside themselves'.<sup>16</sup> The full development of reason and fantasy that this freedom will allow must lead to a religion of 'monotheism of reason and of the heart, polytheism of the imagination and of art'.<sup>17</sup>

Hegel's frequent references to the modern European's lack of a set of shared meanings and images that might foster community, his criticism of the Biblical stories, is summed up in the demand for a new mythology, that could become the spiritual foundation of a new humanism.<sup>18</sup> This mythology must be 'a mythology of reason', a set of images and concepts that can satisfy the aesthetic yearnings and fantasy of the people but which does not betray the progress of reason. Such a mythology would prevent the growth of a separate caste of priests, since its message would be open to all, and would encourage the union of all social activities, the awareness of a common purpose. Hegel's description of its role and possibilities anticipates both the style and content of Young Hegelian thought, particularly that of Moses Hess, in its projection of a society in which all religious values have been concretized as the perfection of social relations. Such a humanist *polis*, unlike the rational state of Hegel's mature thought, cannot coexist with Christianity, but rather seeks to become the fullness of the Kingdom of God:

'so must enlightened and unenlightened finally join hands; mythology must become philosophical and the people rational, and philosophy must become mythological, in order to become sensuous. Then will be the rule of eternal unity among us. No longer the contemptuous glance, the blind fear of the people before its priests and wise men. Only then can we expect an equal development of our powers, of each individual and of all men. No power will be suppressed any longer. Then universal freedom and equality of spirits will rule. A higher spirit, sent from heaven, must found this new religion among us – it will be the last great work of humanity.'<sup>19</sup>



Hegel's last youthful attempt to deal with the problem of religion and community was in *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (*The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*) (1798–1800). The first section of this work treats of Judaism as a religion of utter positivity, the rock of legalism and human apathy upon which the universal spirit of Christianity was to shatter. The Jewish rejection of human community began with Abraham, who broke all ties of love in favour of a self-centred relationship with a transcendent God. All Abraham's links with nature and other men were determined by his absolute sense of self-maintenance, so that the only possible relationship was one of hostility and domination. While other nations were happy to share their gods' various gifts, Abraham's God was jealous and exclusive: 'His ideal subjugated the world to him, gave him as much of the world as he needed, and put him in security against the rest; worship of God consisted in contempt for the world.'<sup>20</sup> Abraham's wanderings were a rejection of community, but even when they settled in Canaan the Jews were incapable of authentic ethical life. The liberation from Egypt was transformed immediately into the legalism of Mt. Sinai. Jewish men had to marry and own property before they were required for military service, since only then did they have a private reason to fight – to die for the community itself as an ideal was meaningless. The Jewish worship of transcendence acted only to pervert their relationships to all other peoples and to destroy their own history as a race by burdening it with an allegiance to a God divorced from human nature.<sup>21</sup>

Hegel's analysis of Jesus and the birth of Christianity in *Der Geist des Christentums* attempts to show how a gospel of communal love which is unable to transform the brutal world of the unfree state is fated to develop into a sect which abandons universal ethical values in favour of positivity. To the Jewish law, originating in submission to an alien Lord, Jesus opposed 'not a partial subjection of one's own, the self-coercion of Kantian virtue, but virtues without lordship and without submission, that is, virtues as modifications of love.'<sup>22</sup> In Jesus' teaching man and God related to each other in a spirit of recognition and identification. His own divinity consisted in his life in the spirit, a life that all his disciples could share. Man's relationship to God was the source of the human values of a community of love, and the indwelling of the spirit was the urge to develop all man's own potential in inner-worldly activity – this was the meaning of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God.<sup>23</sup>

The rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the Roman state began the destruction of the possibility of the Kingdom. Repelled by the harsh intransigence of the secular world, Jesus abandoned it to its fate. He accepted the alien and unreformed power of the state as long as it would grant him the minimum of life within his own community of love.

Jesus' 'association of beauty' thus sacrificed the essential element of freedom contained in active relationships with the world itself. Although the spiritual relationships within the religious group were experienced on a far higher level, Christianity sealed its own fate by leaving the world unreconciled to the spirit, choosing subjective holiness rather than facing the task of permeating the secular world with a higher ethical life. Since the community of love remained an island in a sea of corruption, in its struggle with the world it could not avoid taking over the characteristics of its own enemy, while preserving the fanaticism of purity. Because of love's failure to externalize itself into ethical ties and living relationships it had to resort to a false objectification of Jesus as divinity. From then on God's relationship to the world was conceived either as the austere antipathy of protestant sectarianism or the authoritarianism of Catholicism. Even a benevolent God gave what was due to man's own nature as a gift of grace. It became the fate of Christianity that 'church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly action, can never dissolve into one'.<sup>24</sup>

In his critique of Judaism and Christianity Hegel never questioned that religion was an essential human activity, a response to the infinite that was the foundation of all culture. The suggestions of religionless humanism that sometimes occur are discounted by the unequivocality of his affirmation in *Die Positivität der christlichen Religion*:

'I am here assuming from the start that human nature itself of necessity needs to recognize a Being who transcends our consciousness of Human agency, to make the intuition of that Being's perfection the animating spirit of human life, and to devote time, feelings and organizations directly to this intuition, independently of aims of other kinds.'<sup>25</sup>

The fruit of his reflections was an insight into the relationship between religion and socio-political life which perceived the urgent need for the religious relationship to the divine to develop a world of ethical values out of itself which could be capable of transforming secularity itself into a spiritual realm.<sup>26</sup> His attack on positivity was intended to show that an inward-looking religious community could only objectify itself in systems of belief that had nothing to do with concrete human relationships. For the young Hegel such systems of dogma were inextricably linked with political unfreedom, and the return of a world of ethical community was only possible once a religion of rational simplicity and free fantasy was re-created. This was the hope and question he had for Germany in the last years of the Empire:

'Apart from some earlier attempts, it has been reserved in the main for our epoch to vindicate at least in theory the human ownership of the treasures freely squandered on heaven; but what age will have the strength to validate this right in practice and make itself its possessor?'<sup>27</sup>

## 2. THE DIVINE LIFE-PROCESS AND HUMAN EXISTENCE IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Hegel's mature interpretation of history depended on a radically different evaluation of the Greek *polis* and of Christianity to that which informed his early writings. Whereas in the early writings the *polis* was understood as a harmonious unity of religious, social and cultural elements, the mature Hegel sees it as necessarily unstable – most of all because it lacked universality and subjectivity. Its stability was maintained only through the suppression of critical thought, exemplified in the death of Socrates. Its economic system was dependent on slavery and political decisions were linked to the superstitious use of oracles.<sup>28</sup> In the *Philosophy of History* Hegel speaks of the religious and intellectual subjectivity that arose at the death of the *polis* as progress of the spirit, in contrast to the conviction of his youth that it represented only a decay of communal ideals. Man found in the inner world of the spirit an opportunity to develop himself on a higher plane, in preparation for a new world of universality. The destruction of the old gods meant at the same time the discovery of the God-Man, fulfilling subjective freedom in a new way. The end of Greek serenity meant freedom just as original sin and the fall were the expression of man's choice of pain and freedom over the naive bliss of identification with a primal oneness:

'Paradise is a park, where only animals can remain, not man, because an animal is one with God, but unconscious. Only man is a guest in Paradise, that is, he is self-conscious. This self-consciousness is at the same time a separation from the universal divine spirit. If I stand on my own abstract freedom against the good, then this is precisely the standpoint of evil. The fall of man, original sin, is therefore the eternal myth of man's becoming man.'<sup>29</sup>

Hegel's youthful writings describe the unity of religious and social goals in the *polis* in terms that allow little conflict between the imperative of honouring the gods and serving the human commonwealth. The division between the laws of heaven and the social order was for the young Hegel one of the false products of private transcendental religion, of Judaism and Christianity. In the *polis* religion did not intrude to set up a loyalty distinct from that due to the city itself. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, however, Hegel penetrates more deeply into the complex relationships between divine and social law in the *polis*. The legend of Antigone demonstrates the possibility of a clash between the city and the gods, as well as showing how much the vitality of civic life depends on the preservation of religious worship and obedience to divine command:

'The public, revealed spirit has the roots of its strength in the nether world. The certainty of the people, self-confident and self-authenticating, has the truth of its oath that binds all into one only in the unconscious and mute substance of all, in the waters of forgetfulness.'<sup>30</sup>

Because the public and conscious life of the *polis* derives its strength from the natural life of the family, the realm of woman that is rooted in the chthonic forces and religious practices, the victory of public need over the claims of the family is necessarily self-defeating. War rescues the citizen from the warm and introverted life of the family and returns him to the self-sacrificial heroism of public life, but to threaten the services to the gods expressed in family ritual is to risk the destruction of the spiritual foundations of the *polis*, the protection of the gods themselves. Antigone's conflict with Creon is the conflict of religious and social obligation, a conflict that must be resolved if the *polis* is to survive. It is the same conflict that Hegel saw in the life of Jesus and the fate of the Christian community in his early works. If religion is the source of men's moral motivations and provides the images for their cultural creativity, it must be directed towards community and prevented from becoming an occupation that threatens to tear men away from their mutual needs and obligations. To oppose the demands of religion and social ethics must, as in the story of Antigone, eventually weaken the ethical basis of society itself. The recognition that this was so, that belief in the necessity of man's orientation towards the infinite spirit was the foundation of ethical community, determined Hegel's interpretation of Christianity in his mature system.

In this system the critique of Christianity is transformed into an attempt to develop a concept of Christianity and of religion in general that will be compatible with the free development of reason in the world and at the same time a fitting vehicle for absolute spirit. Since reason and freedom must be the characteristics of the spirit in every sphere of its activity, then religion, too, must be understood in their light and related harmoniously to a secular social world inspired by the same consciousness. At the beginning of his *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel sets out the problem of his early works in a simple dichotomy as the division between faith in God and a free human consciousness capable of creating its own world. Man can be understood as the creature which knows and responds to God as an independent entity, conscious of his powers of rational insight and creativity in a world apart from divine transcendence:

'On the one hand, he knows himself to be his own master; he is involved in his own goals and interests and determines himself independently and self-sufficiently. On the other hand, he may recognize a higher power and absolute duty, duties without his own corresponding rights, and what he receives for the carrying out of his duties remains always and only grace.'<sup>31</sup>

The reconciliation of human independence with belief in an omnipotent God can be achieved only by a philosophy of religion which seeks rational knowledge of God, transcending religion as feeling and pure inwardness. For Hegel, the knowledge of God is all important, since our concept of the interrelationship of God and the world depends on our perception of his nature.<sup>32</sup>

Since God is rationality itself, reason can claim to understand his nature, eliminating restricted forms and rising to the universality which is commensurate with absolute spirit. The religious consciousness must evolve through the stages of feeling and representation to the comprehensiveness of the concept, a movement which coincides with the striving of absolute spirit to become objective to itself. This activity is reflected in the phenomenology of religions, each of which represents a stage in the self-education of spirit, its struggle to escape the restrictions of ritual and dogma imposed by each particular religion and come to full self-consciousness in the absolute religion, which worships God through a rational consciousness commensurate to his nature. Each concept of God in this historical development involves man's own self-concept and man's relationship to the divine reflects his understanding of human community: to co-exist harmoniously religion and society must be understood as different realms of activity of the same free and rational spirit. In this way the belief in immortality, which Hegel saw as an element of positivity in his youth, is now understood as an insight into human nature which is essential to man's dignity in his social life.

The relationship of religion and philosophy can be summed up as the relationship of conceptual thought to the concrete symbols of a faith tradition (*Vorstellung*), which are understood to have both the transcendent and the historical as their content.<sup>33</sup> The symbolic forms of *Vorstellung* represent the 'moments' of spirit's self-development as distinct entities:

'In this separation form and content part company and the different moments of the concept become distinct spheres or elements, each of which is a representation of the absolute content.'<sup>34</sup>

The initial role of thought in relation to religion is to analyse religious imagery and to make explicit the interconnections that necessarily prevail between the concepts that are embedded in it. This process of rational elucidation begins to reveal 'the concept in its freedom', gradually transforming the symbolic content of religion into a self-justifying system of concepts. The various symbols that characterize the mode of *Vorstellung* are united into a rational system, so that none of the elements of religious belief may contradict each other. Religious truth is given a form appropriate to its content: reason is capable of grasping

the content of religious symbolism, which has no ultimate superiority over transparently rational concepts. By overcoming the symbolic phase of religious discourse, reason assures itself of its own freedom: it need not relate to religious truth as to a revelation that maintains a distinct and irreducible opacity to human reason. The assumption that revealed truth transcends human reason is based, for Hegel, on a notion of revelation and human receptivity that is incapable of grasping the unity in difference of finite and infinite, of divine and human natures. Reason does not bow before the symbols and images of revelation because it knows that it itself shares the same nature as the divine source of revelation and can therefore come to understand the processes of divineline and the divine intervention in human history without recourse to the system of images characteristic of the mode of *Vorstellung*. The process of reason attempts to retain the complex truths of religious imagery and symbolism, to avoid reducing the content of religion to the empty 'supreme being' of Enlightenment deism, while at the same time making the rational content of all these images fully explicit.

The dichotomy of *Vorstellung* and of speculative reason is for Hegel the same as that of immediacy and mediation. Immediacy presupposes that God can be an external empirical fact for the believer. The process of mediation, on the other hand, assumes that God and man are related in a way which necessitates the use of reason. If God is utterly distinct from man, then man must relate to him through immediacy, in particular the immediacy of religious feeling. If God's relationship to man is characterized neither by identity nor by difference, then man can and must use reason to establish a connection between God and finitude – God is accessible to reason and is no longer an external fact. The classical proofs for the existence of God depend on this insight. The justification for the process of speculation as mediation is our common awareness of the finite as the creation of God and at the same time our awareness of God's independence of his creation.

For Hegel, contemporary religious thought was wrong to understand God's nature as mysterious and transcendent. This conception must reduce man to the status of an observer, preventing the union with the object of knowledge characteristic of reason. The converse of understanding God as a remote beyond, characteristic of deism, was romanticism's tendency to abandon the distinctiveness of human finitude in the search for God. Yet the divine could not be reached by man if man had to abandon his own nature and most precious faculties in the process. Romantic striving could not reach the divine because it stemmed from a false notion of God's infinite nature and its relation to human finitude. The finite subject is seen as an inhabitant of a worthless order and the infinite put over against it. Rejection of the deistic and romantic conceptions of the relationship of God and man presup

poses an examination of the nature of human finitude. Hegel's thesis is that infinite and finite cannot be defined over against each other. The opposition of finite and infinite is, for Hegel, 'abstract' and cannot withstand reflective examination, since if the finite is not part of the infinite, then the infinite is itself limited. The fluidity of the boundary of finite and infinite is for Hegel one of the basic principles of speculative reason:

'We must remain firmly conscious of this; to retain this truth is of overall importance with respect to all forms of reflective consciousness and of philosophy. It is precisely through absolute contrast that this opposition disappears; both sides of the relation disappear to empty moments, and that which remains is their unity, in which both are overcome (*aufgehoben*).'<sup>35</sup>

For Hegel, there is a fundamental contrast between the abstract understanding's (*Verstand*) notion of the relationship between finite and infinite and that characteristic of speculative reason (*Vernunft*). In the mode of abstract understanding, the finite ego considers that the opposition of finite and infinite is its own intellectual creation and that it therefore can also be overcome by the thinking ego. Simply by the power of reflection the ego is thought capable of giving itself an infinite, ideal content. This is the illusion of extreme subjectivity, which posits the infinite and then claims its own identity with it. This theory presupposes that the subjective ego can relate to the infinite on its own terms, that it is good by nature and free of the need to reform itself by a developing relationship with the objective world. For Hegel, goodness comes from the effort to grow in co-operation with the source of life in the absolute, not from the arbitrary and self-sufficient creation of a world by the individual ego. The subjective consciousness is indeed the basis of all ethics and culture, but its creativity stems from humility over against the objective life of the spirit rather than from the power of the ego to posit a world out of its own arbitrary imagination:

'All duty, all right depends on our inmost consciousness, on the stance of the religious self-consciousness, which is the root of the spirit and the foundation of all reality. From this empty point of view, by contrast, no religion at all is possible, since in it I am self-affirming, whereas the self-sufficient and self-conscious (*an und für sich seiende*) idea in religion must be posited exclusively by itself and not by me.'<sup>36</sup>

Hegel's judgement of the abstract understanding's mode of finitude is determined by the same priorities as his judgement of the finite revolutionary will in history and politics. He affirms that the source of all human creativity and progress is in self-consciousness, that historical forms must be subject to the critique of ideals derived from man's reli-

gious experience — but at the same time he insists that these ideals must be objectively derived, rather than being the projections of the individual subjective ego, which has no special right to dictate the priorities of human progress. The possibility of discovering a form of life which may be in opposition to actuality but which is the will of the absolute spirit rather than of the individual ego is the task of speculative reason, and it is the achievement of true religion to give man an identification with the absolute which assures this possibility. Hegel's notion of a finite subject which posits the infinite as its own creation was to be exemplified by Bruno Bauer. For Bauer, since the infinite is an intellectual creation of the human spirit, it is not an objective and external regulator of human activity. This activity is rather defined and motivated by the human subject in specific and everchanging historical situations. The norm of the human is nothing more than its utter freedom.

The true expression of the relationship of finite and infinite is achieved by speculative reason, which is capable of recognizing a truth which is objectively independent of the subject's ego. This truth negates the particular subjectivity of the observer, but can give it back its freedom on a higher plane, since by recognizing and identifying with what is objective outside itself the ego loses its particularity and becomes universal — it is able to reach the standpoint of reason, which is the free affirmation of objective truth. This movement of thought is the philosophical reflection of religious humility: the true admission of finitude is the acknowledgement that the subjective mind achieves universality only by a receptivity to the objective that eliminates any arbitrary projections of its own. For Hegel this ensures that 'my relationship to the thing qua particular person is removed, and I relate to it objectively.'<sup>37</sup>

The relationships of finite and infinite can be best understood, for Hegel, by reflection upon the necessary process of divine life itself. The act of creation is not something external to God's nature, but an element of his own life. The creation of the finite world by God sets up another over against himself, and reduces God to finitude since this other is outside him. But this other has no real permanence over against God. Its creation is the path of God's self-externalization and self-recovery — the process by which God himself becomes fully self-conscious:

'It is both other and not other; it dissolves itself; it is not itself, but another; it brings about its own downfall. Yet in this way everything alien quite disappears into God, and God recognizes himself in it, through this process recovering himself as his own product (*wodurch er als Resultat seiner durch sich sich selbst erhält*).'<sup>38</sup>

The relationship of finite and infinite is therefore not a fixed contradiction, but rather a process, in which the infinite constantly externalizes



itself into finite objects that achieve existence over against the infinite, but whose independence is never final, and which eventually return into the life-process of the infinite. The living God is the process of self-externalizing and self-recapturing movement. Because of this the finite does not remain a fixed category. God moves towards the finite and re-unites it with himself. In this he achieves a new self-definition: 'In the I, which overcomes itself as finite, God returns to himself and is God only in this return. Without the world, God is not God.'<sup>39</sup>

The false insistence upon the infinite qualitative difference between divine and human consciousness produces a view of religion which concentrates upon man as the focus of religious feeling but which remains ignorant of God's nature. For Hegel, by contrast, the speculative grasp of the interrelationship of finite and infinite implies that religion is less man's relationship to God than God's relationship to himself within the process of self-externalization and self-recovery. The ideal of rational knowledge is that the totality of existence should come to self-consciousness, that that which knows becomes as comprehensive and all-embracing as that which is known. This process is the emergence of spirit itself, in Hegel's sense of the word, since spirit is that which comes to full self-knowledge as the culmination of a dialectical process of development: 'spirit is only spirit, when it is there for the spirit.'<sup>40</sup> Thus the fulfilment of religion is not the relationship of the finite soul to the infinite divine nature, but the relationship of the absolute, God, to itself. Religion is the speculative description of the living processes of the divine spirit. Because the finite is ultimately called back to the infinite, which is the same as saying that the infinite finds its most self-conscious expression in the finite, religion is the 'self-consciousness of the absolute spirit' rather than a purely human activity. It relates God to God through man, rather than man to God. That in the finite which is alien to God's nature is overcome and the other to which God relates is revealed to be itself God. Finitude is the product of the absolute spirit's own act of self-differentiation: it is a moment of the process of the absolute rather than irrevocably over against it. God's life is to posit the finite mind and to reach self-consciousness within this mind. This self-consciousness, when all that is becomes known to itself, when being is comprehended by thought, is the completion of the life of the absolute spirit:

'Religion, then, is self-knowledge of the divine spirit through the mediation of the finite spirit. In the truest sense religion is, because of this, not man's affair, but rather essentially the highest definition of the absolute idea itself.'<sup>41</sup>

Man's religious response to God becomes an aspect of God's self-knowledge. Creation is the product of God's self-objectification: nature is the moment in the divine process of God's self-differentiation,

while the return to full self-consciousness is spirit. The otherness (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of nature over against God is real, yet not ultimate. It is overcome, so that the spirit becomes the 'totality of its differentiations'.<sup>42</sup> Creation, and the finite, human mind which is its apex, is essentially a process of theogony. God's manifestation to the finite consciousness is a self-manifestation, so that the process by which God creates the finite mind and appears to it goes on to unite knower and known, finite and infinite, in the self-knowledge of the absolute which is the fullness of spirit:

'God is only God inasmuch as he knows himself; his self-knowledge is his self-consciousness in man and man's knowledge of God, which goes on to become man's self-knowledge in God.'<sup>43</sup>

The overcoming of the opposition between finite and infinite is, however, not an achievement open to a simple act of reflection made at any stage of human history. It is the ultimate product of the Christian religion and the development of the modern, autonomous self-consciousness. The philosophical awareness of the identity in difference of finite and infinite is possible only after the full development of religion: philosophy's self-conscious, rational and articulated expression depends on the labour of overcoming the gulf between finite and infinite which is performed in religion. The self-knowledge of the absolute spirit is achieved through the act of revelation, of which the history of Christianity is an integral consequence. The first form of man's unity with God in the spirit is not philosophical but religious, and it takes place in the context of religious liturgy, or cult. Cult achieves an existential unity of human and divine, which only later becomes theoretical. The religious consciousness of God in cult is God's self-consciousness: 'that which we have called the representation of God, is also God's being.'<sup>44</sup>

Cult is 'the activity of realizing this previously defined unity and the enjoyment of it, so that that which is implicit in belief may be fulfilled, felt and enjoyed.'<sup>45</sup> In it the relationship of human consciousness and the divine spirit is made concrete. The individual subject's realization of the identity of finite and infinite is achieved through the act of sacrifice, the chief element of the liturgy. The subject gives up its natural particularity in order to achieve a communion with the spirit. To cling to 'naturalness' is to insist that the created order, the first moment of the divine process, is ultimately distinct from God. It is the denial of the fullness of the process of divine life which can be achieved only by man's 'renunciation of his immediate finitude'.<sup>46</sup> In the cult, the human subject comes to practical consciousness of its own infinite nature, because it is prepared to abandon the arbitrariness of the finite ego in favour of identification with the reality of the absolute. Individu-

ality acquires worth once it is prepared to renounce the immediacy of natural particularity and achieve the status of 'universal individuality'.<sup>47</sup>

The awareness of identification with the absolute is man's elevation above the plane of nature onto the final stage of the process of divine life. Man's true purpose is to liberate himself from his natural life to find identification with the spirit that has its temporary expression in nature:

'This freedom is the movement of the absolute spirit in him through the overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of what is natural and finite. Man, precisely because he has achieved consciousness of the infinite character of his own spirit, has cut himself off from nature and from himself. This is what creates the field of true freedom.'<sup>48</sup>

In religious terms, man can achieve goodness only through the effort of abandoning his own self-will, that which attempts to set up its own world in defiance of God. Man's involvement with the process of divine life in history is the origin of his own self-confidence, the 'enjoyment and certainty of the reconciliation that is present in it'.<sup>49</sup> The process by which subjectivity is cleansed of its natural particularity in the experience of religious liturgy, once it has become firmly established and permeated civilization, becomes the basis of the ethical life which eventually finds its full expression in the rational state.

Since religion is the process whereby the absolute spirit becomes self-conscious through the finite mind, where God's self-externalization is overcome by the negation of the finitude of the human mind and its elevation as a vessel of the spirit, then revelation must be an act that does not simply flow from a 'decision' of God made with reference to the historical moral and religious condition of the human race, but rather a necessity of God's nature, the way in which God comes to self-knowledge. This is so because, for Hegel, God's self-knowledge is ultimately to be identified with man's knowledge of God. The projected identity of divine and human nature is conceivable only as an identity of consciousness, which is also an identity of knowledge. Self-manifestation is a necessary act of the absolute spirit, since the fulfilment of spirit is precisely the movement from *Ansichsein* to *Fürsichsein*, from implicit power to explicit self-consciousness, from substance to subjectivity. Revelation achieves spirit's need to objectify itself, and the finite consciousness provides a milieu for the spirit to re-unite itself with these objectifications. Creation and revelation cannot be thought of as acts that God may or may not have performed, but necessities of the process of divine life.

'God is, as a spirit, essentially this self-manifestation; he does not create the world once for all, but is rather the eternal creator, this eternal self-manifestation, this act. This is God's essence, his definition.'<sup>50</sup>

The meaning of revelation is that God is 'for the other': because the spirit's life depends on its self-expression in the works of nature it can only be conceived as present to another, to the human consciousness.

The revelation of God takes place in historical events, which come to the mind of the believer as external and positive. Here Hegel attempts to transcend his youthful critique by developing a concept of positivity that poses no threat to rational freedom. Anything coming externally to our consciousness has an element of positivity, he notes, even the free ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) which must be communicated through education. The laws of the state are positive since they relate to detailed external life and involve, for example, arbitrary round numbers in imposing punishment. In these forms, as in religion, positivity is acceptable when it is capable of being reconciled with reason, made at home with the free consciousness. Apparently external historical forms can become the foundation of a 'law of freedom', valid not because of their sheer, alien existence but because they give a form to our own rationality. The structure of reality which is revealed in religion gives subjectivity a content in which to live and to express itself. Although this reality is not the creation of the subject's own mind, its rationality can subsequently be disclosed by speculative reason.

The historical events of revelation define for us the limits and content of our belief but cannot be its source and justification. This comes through the spirit alone, and the spirit is ultimately independent of empirical historical events. It expresses itself in them, but cannot be validated by them. What allows man to respond to revelation is his recognition of the spirit within it, not the force of empirical evidence, since these isolated events in space and time are in themselves unspiritual. The religious response of belief in revelation is the beginning of philosophy, because it depends on the human mind's elevation above empirical events to a purely spiritual response to God's self-revelation. For Hegel, this response is pre-eminently performed by the faculty of reason, the grasp of speculative concepts:

'the highest need of the human spirit is thought, the witness of the spirit . . . the highest mode of witness to the spirit is the mode of philosophy, in which the pure concept itself, without any presuppositions, develops the truth out of itself, is recognized as developing and whose necessity is recognized in and through this development.'<sup>51</sup>

The spirit reaches truth when it is capable of seeing itself in all its objects, so that the realm of created nature becomes the self-

consciousness of spirit, 'the truth is, not to relate to the object as something alien'.<sup>52</sup> This truth is also freedom, since the spirit no longer finds itself in an alien world, it is a 'negation of the difference of the other' (*eine Negation des Unterschiedes des Andersseins*).<sup>53</sup> To abolish alienation by finding itself in its creation is for the spirit a reconciliation with reality, but this reconciliation is activity rather than stasis, it is 'freedom, not the simple repose of being'.<sup>54</sup> The explication of the unity of divine and human nature is the liberation of finite spirit, since it now perceives itself to be at home in the created world. The liberation of man follows upon his awareness that he is at one with the reason that has formed his environment. The most destructive aspect of positivity was its alienation of God from the world, and so the task of the philosophy of religion is to show how Christianity, as the absolute religion, restores the union of God and the world which will reconcile religion with a free secular ethic. Out of the eternal substance of the divine substance, spirit develops until it reaches the point of human self-consciousness which can recognize its own unity with the divine, an awareness that is the sign of the modern age: 'the spirit is consequently a living process, in which the implicit unity of the divine and human natures is brought forth and made explicit.'<sup>55</sup>

Man as a natural creature is mortal, but the infinite subjectivity in man which represents his meeting with the absolute is immortal. He is aware of the crucial division within him between his infinite definition and his given status as a part of nature. Man as he finds himself is not what he can be – and what he can be is, for Hegel, what he in truth is. This division of actuality and reality becomes explicit and conscious for man. In his state of division (*Entzweiung*) man's infinite vocation is a stranger to him, and he is motivated by natural will. Man's pain is the awareness of this internal contradiction, the awareness of his opposition to the good which is his vocation. It reaches a pitch of intensity as man becomes aware that the good he seeks and has lost is God: evil is to accept himself purely as part of nature, determined by unreflective drives and instincts. Man's misery stems from the irreconcilability of his own limited, natural ego in its pathetic finitude and imprisonment within nature with the infinite definition which is his objective destiny. Surrounded by the works of his divided self, man strives hopelessly to abstract himself from the world to achieve a union with the spirit that he perceives as an ideal realm transcending the wretched bounds of his own life. Yet this flight from reality must represent a flight from involvement and action. To abandon the unreconciled world is to avoid the problem of uniting my own divided nature: I am a citizen of the world, capable of will and action, and this power must find its expression within a new and reconciled world.

The reconciliation which God brings about in history follows upon

the most extreme intensity of contradiction within the finite subject, the awareness of the gulf between his own will and action and the spiritual power that is his divine birthright. It is the spirit, the work of God, that brings forth the possibility of reconciliation, that saves man from the dreadful alternative of remaining immersed in a sinful world or sacrificing his will by abstracting himself from the world into a lifeless ideal sphere. The subject is brought to the realization that his natural self is not his true definition: that the irreconcilable division between his ideas and his world and actions can be overcome only by accepting the substantial will of God, by overcoming the limited particularity of his own ego. This reconciliation is achieved by God, as a part of the process of his own life, his own restoration of the unity of his nature. Even if all men were to engage in acts of piety and devotion, conforming to an abstract law of good, God's rule could not be established on earth. This is because the will and actions of the finite subject merely posit an ideal and cannot change the basic structure of reality. In Hegel's terms, the possibility of reconciliation must be embedded in reality before the subjective finite will is capable of making it explicit. Man's own actions are powerless to change the fundamental characteristics of his environment: he remains in the painful circle of involvement in a world of force and evil and escape to the realm of unrealizable ideals. God must himself have acted to reconcile himself with his own creation, to complete the process of his own life, before man can achieve a clear vision of his own purpose, a reconciliation of intellect and will. Man's attempt to posit an ideal world receives support and substance from the presence of the spirit in reality:

'The unity of subjectivity and objectivity must be presupposed as a divine unity before I can posit it; only then does it have any content; its content is the spirit, real substance — otherwise it must be formal and subjective; only thus does it receive genuine, substantial content.'<sup>56</sup>

God's presence in the world is the presupposition for truth and for morality. Man's pain can be abolished not by his own efforts but by his recognition of the presence of God in the world, and this recognition is the genuine overcoming of his own tension. Just as God differentiates himself in creation and reunites this creation with himself, so man is involved in a constant process of self-restoration, a process which depends on, and is an expression of, the infinite process of divine life. Since created nature is part of the divine life-process, man's incommensurability with the infinite, his immersion in natural particularity, is also an aspect of this process: the self-alienation of God, which is also the self-alienation of man, is real and remains, but is constantly overcome. The world is not elevated to a realm of perfection, but man is

aware that the possibility of union with the absolute is inherent in it. The pain and tension of natural life remains, constantly impelling man to find the eternal reality that can provide the basis in substance for his own self-realization. Man's pain at the discovery that his own actions are powerless to affect the course of the world, his realization that his own ideals can never effect a substantial transformation of reality, is reconciled in his perception of his own unity with the divine process. Although this means the abandonment of his unique particularity, it guarantees each individual the confidence of co-operation with the work of God in history. 'The pain which the finite feels in this self-overcoming (*Aufhebung*) is no pain, since through it it elevates itself to an element in the divine process.'<sup>57</sup>

Yet if it is the absolute which conveys substance to man's subjective will, it is man who enacts the moment of subjectivity in the divine life-process. Man loses his natural particularity by identifying with the spirit, but his own subjectivity is endorsed by the need of the spirit to find concrete, empirical expression in the world. Because of this the spirit wills itself to be incarnated as a human person. This incarnation is the true counterpart to the universal and mediated life of the spirit because it occurs as absolute immediacy, as a unique historical event. God appears in nature as man, because man is the most spiritual form of nature. 'This fulfilment of reality in immediate individuality is the most beautiful characteristic of the Christian religion.'<sup>58</sup> The uniqueness of the incarnation is an essential aspect of the divine life-process. Since the divine must communicate itself to man in the totality of its life, it must also take the form of immediacy, of finitude. The truth that God can appear as man is accessible only to speculative reason: for the understanding finite and infinite remain irreconcilable. For speculative reason, the incarnation is a necessity since it accords with the eternal life-process of the divine. 'This is the mighty truth whose necessity we have perceived. Thus it is posited, that the divine and human natures are not differentiated in themselves — God in human form. The truth is, that there is only one reason, one spirit, that the spirit as finite has no genuine existence.'<sup>59</sup>

For Hegel, the movement of spirit is the same as that of the concept, which, in his logic, has both abstract and concrete 'moments'. The concept is not merely a tool of thought, but rather part of the underlying structure of reality. As such, it is the unity of the abstract idea of a thing and its concrete existence.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel emphasizes that existence as a concrete individual is a necessary aspect of the life-process of the spirit. The empirical existence of the spirit, as a man present to the senses, means that absolute substance has, through a necessary process, expressed the truth that it is also self-consciousness. The spirit is now 'knowledge of itself in its self-

externalization'.<sup>61</sup> The chief characteristic of Christianity, the absolute religion, is therefore its complete clarity: it is religion as manifestation, total revelation, the disappearance of the mystery of the infinite as it becomes spirit, which is primordial self-consciousness.

'This is then the true form of the spirit, to be revealed according to its concept, and this form, the concept alone, is its essence and substance. It is known *qua* self-consciousness and is revealed to self-consciousness immediately, since it is itself self-consciousness; the divine nature is the same as human nature and it is this unity which we contemplate.'<sup>62</sup>

Here substance and self-consciousness first become proportionate to each other, their struggle is resolved and self-consciousness is rendered capable of expressing all the riches of substance. Its vain efforts to cast the world in its own image are left behind in the realization that the substance of the absolute is what informs the development of human history. This incarnation in self-consciousness appears to be a descent from the absolute's eternal simplicity but it is in fact its highest achievement, the union of being and thought. The realization of self-consciousness that it shares in the objective reality that proceeds from the absolute is the resolution of the conflicts of the philosophies of the late ancient world. The ideal person of stoicism and the restlessness of scepticism are the forms

'which stand crowding expectantly around the birthplace of the spirit which is becoming self-consciousness; the pain and longing of the unhappy consciousness is its centre and the shared birth-pain of its origins. It is the simplicity of the pure concept, which contains all these forms as its moments.'<sup>63</sup>

The substantial reconciliation of God with his own creation, and its corollary, man's overcoming of his own divided self, is the result of the incarnation. The incarnation resolves man's religious anguish and at the same time lays the foundation of a new world. The new consciousness of man is one of reconciliation which conditions all his actions in history. External existence is founded on man's religious condition just as the new reconciliation of his nature is the expression of God's self-recovery. Before the incarnation, man's efforts to bend reality towards an image of perfection remained sterile since they were simply the projections of finite subjective will. Now, however, that man's efforts have become the expression of God's own striving towards full self-consciousness, the world of alienation and evil is deprived of all its foundations. The new religion, founded on the incarnation, is the essence of man's long struggle to transform historical reality into a fitting environment for his own rational freedom. Its task is the destruction of the world of alienation and the construction of a new world of the spirit:



'This Kingdom of God, this new religion has the implicit character of a negation of the existing world (*das Vorhandene*). This is the revolutionary aspect of the doctrine, which in part casts established reality aside, and in part overturns and destroys it. All mundane, earthly things fall away valueless and are pronounced to be so. The world of the past changes; the former situation, the condition of religion and the world cannot remain as it was.'<sup>64</sup>

Jesus' unique role becomes clear only after his death and resurrection, through which the apostles realize that his life and teachings were the revelation of a crucial step in the process of divine life. During his life Jesus made clear to his apostles that what he taught was not, fundamentally, a new ethical creed but rather a totally new relationship to God, the coming of God into the world. The Kingdom of God was now irrevocably offered to man. Christ's death was the proof of his humanity, but implied at the same time the death of the unredeemed world of the past. The elevation of the cross to the place of highest honour is the destruction of all the established bonds of human society. The new dispensation empties the old world of all its validity, demanding a new beginning for every type of community and political order:

'When the cross is raised on high as a banner, whose positive content is the Kingdom of God, then the inner conviction is withdrawn from the life of society and the state and its substantial foundations removed, so that the whole structure has no reality any longer, is only empty appearance, which must soon noisily collapse, revealing in concrete existence its implicit nullity (*dass sie nicht mehr an sich ist auch im Dasein manifestieren muss*).'<sup>65</sup>

Human finitude itself has a tendency to evil, when it is set up as alien to God's identification with man. It was Christ's act to win over this finitude for God by identifying with it: 'This finitude, in its self-conscious existence over against God, is evil, alien to God; yet he took it to himself in order to kill it through his own death.'<sup>66</sup> The meaning of Jesus' death was that God's love was so great that he willed to identify Himself with that which was alien to him – with finitude. Although this death took place in the realm of nature, it was the death of God, because God had chosen to express his own eternal life-process within nature. Because it was the death of God, it was able to gain redemption for all men, that is, it was able to achieve that substantial reconciliation of God and the world which would provide the basis for all human moral action. The death of God is the death of substance as alienated from subject, from self-consciousness, the overcoming of transcendence and the beginning of the new life of the immanent spirit:

'The death of this image implies at the same time the death of an abstract divine essence which is not posited as a self. It is the anguish of the unhappy consciousness that God himself has died . . . This anguish is indeed the loss of substance and

of its opposition to consciousness; but at the same time it is the pure *subjectivity* of substance or pure self-certainty, which it lacked as an object, as immediacy, or as a pure essence. This knowledge is thus a spiritualization, through which substance becomes subject, dying to its abstraction and lifelessness: it becomes real, a simple and universal self-consciousness.<sup>67</sup>

Hegel's understanding of the 'old Adam' is of a natural particularity which is incapable of rendering its finitude up to the infinite: the 'old Adam' died when God identified himself with him and died with him. This, in turn, was the end of God's life-phase of self-externalization and the beginning of the phase of self-recapture. After the death and resurrection of Jesus God and the world are fundamentally reconciled (*an sich versöhnt*), so that man is no longer condemned to strive after union with a God who transcends the morass of human history. God's will was to be present to man in the events which surrounded him, and man could achieve freedom by identifying his own subjectivity with the divine will which was now embodied in history. Man's moral actions had their essential basis in the identification of finite and infinite will: reality could now be transformed by man according to an ideal because it had already been permeated with this ideal. The concept already lived in the structure of reality: 'In order for the individual man to do something, for his actions to be fulfilled, it is necessary that reality already have this structure in its concept (*dass die Sache in ihrem Begriff sich so verhalte*).'<sup>68</sup>

The historical existence of Jesus is not an arbitrary, particular event, but the essential embodiment in the created world of the process of divine life. Christ's death is for all, an universal event, since it is a turning-point in the life of God. Hegel's understanding of Christ's atoning death is not in the context of a divine demand for satisfaction, but rather as part of the development of divine existence: in this death, God accepts the character of finite existence and identifies with it. Its otherness, its radical apartness, is thereby abolished. This acceptance of the pain of finitude is the revelation of God's absolute love. The sins and errors of man, the negative that formerly seemed utterly opposed to God's nature, are taken up in him. The negative is no longer outside God and does not hinder unity with him: 'The other, negation, is perceived to be a moment of the divine nature itself'.<sup>68a</sup> God's death abolished the power of this negative by overcoming it in the dialectic of his own life. The negative is absorbed and overcome, and the restored unity of the divine spirit rules in history, being the objective presupposition for the realm of rationality and freedom that the finite will strives to fulfil.

Hegel's speculative interpretation of the trinitarian doctrine of God provided the foundation for a unified understanding of finite and

infinite, human and divine existence. The way in which this unity was structured was intimately related to Hegel's major concerns in the understanding of philosophy, religion and politics: human dignity and freedom could be given an infinite source in the divine existence, the positivity of religious forms could be overcome through the notion of spirit as utter self-clarity, and the central doctrines and symbols of Christianity could thereby be given a new and vital interpretation.

### 3. THE DIVINE SPIRIT IN HUMAN HISTORY

Since, for Hegel, the divine life-process was immanent in world history, true knowledge of the divine could be had by a speculative contemplation of that history. The gulf between faith and reason could be bridged through comprehension of the work of the absolute in history, the discovery of the way in which the identification of the absolute with man's fate in the incarnation was worked out in the progressive transformation of human institutions according to the divine characteristics of freedom and reason. Religious belief that was incapable of expressing itself in ethical life and moral humanism that searched for an ideal without knowledge or experience of the genuine independence of the objective world from its own constructs could only be reconciled by a philosophy of history which achieved rational insight into the providential work of God in history. Religion's spiritual content could be seen to be expressed in concrete institutions and the transcendent world of the moral consciousness given reality by the divine will.

For Hegel, an understanding of history was the only way to win free of the desire to impose the finite subjective will on reality. By understanding the role and purpose of the divine spirit in history, man could rid himself of the illusion that his own will could reduplicate itself in the external world. The philosophy of history revealed that man's will was an essential part of God's self-creating purpose, but that the objects of this will were never achieved as they had been humanly envisaged. The work of God and the realization of his purpose was always the resultant of forces – only one of which was the explicit intention of the finite will. The finite will's interaction with nature and other wills was the dynamic by which the absolute reached its goal, and this goal was always the true path for man. Because of this the philosophy of history was the only true and complete theodicy:

'That world history is the process of development and the real becoming of the spirit, in the form of the changing drama of its episodes – this is the true theodicy, the justification of God in history. Only *this* insight can reconcile the spirit with

world-history and with reality, that that which has happened and which happens every day, happens not only not without God but is essentially his work.'<sup>69</sup>

The philosophy of history, for Hegel, presupposes that the will of the absolute can be retrospectively perceived. Its purpose is to follow the rational and necessary will of the absolute spirit in history, to know the path that it has taken. The only assumption of the philosopher of history is that reason is the motive force of history. Reason, in this context, is for Hegel synonymous with God: it is infinite power and substance. Unlike finite activity, the reason of the absolute does not require material apart from itself to achieve its purpose:

'it lives off itself and is itself the material that it works with; just as it is its own presupposition, its goal the absolute and final goal, so it works towards this goal and brings it out from inwardness into the world of phenomena, not only of the natural universe but also of the mental – that is, into world history.'<sup>70</sup>

The assumption of the presence of reason is equivalent to the presupposition of faith that providence rules history, although the latter retains the imagery characteristic of the religious consciousness. Just as his philosophy of religion insisted on the possibility and necessity of a knowledge of God's nature, Hegel's philosophy of history rejects those religious arguments which assert the inscrutability of divine providence and affirms the philosopher's task of discerning the path of reason in history. Philosophy is comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge, ultimately God's self-knowledge, and this knowledge is as much historical as metaphysical, because the life of the divine is historical. For Hegel revelation enjoins the deliberate quest for knowledge of God. Since the development of the rational spirit proceeds from 'this foundation in the revelation of the divine essence' it must eventually be able to comprehend revelation in its own rational terms.

The key to the understanding of spirit is its freedom. Spirit is radically self-contained and does not depend on anything outside itself for its own self-expression. The conquest of evil is part of the spirit's own growth, not the overcoming of an element outside its own sphere. Spirit is self-sufficient and self-oriented. Because history does not add anything to spirit, because it is nothing more than the evolution of the spirit and because this evolution is a necessary process, then all of history is potentially present in its beginnings. History is the concretion of the necessary life-process of the absolute, and in this concretion the finite spirit, man, plays the key role: he it is who brings the spirit to full self-consciousness. Because the principle of the spirit is freedom and world history a progressive conquest of its own self-alienation by the spirit, then history is the progress of freedom as well as of self-consciousness.

This freedom has its specific origin in Christianity, which is consequently the central event of world history.

‘This consciousness arose first of all in religion, in the innermost region of the spirit; but the building of this principle into the being of the world was a further task, whose carrying out and completion required a long and difficult labour.’<sup>71</sup>

Because the spirit’s purposes in history are not to be identified with those of finite will, man’s explicit intentions are not the fundamental motive force of history. The finite will is incapable of transforming the substance of reality, a transformation achieved only by the absolute itself in its reconciliation with the world in the incarnation. The absolute’s tools in human history are more the short-sighted and self-centred needs and passions of particular individuals than the ethical ideals of those concerned to transform the whole. Morality itself, as a pure world distinguished from human need and impulse, is capable of nothing. ‘Need, drive, inclination and passion’ are the stuff of history.<sup>72</sup> The weakness of the purely moral position, for Hegel, is that it proposes an ethical world that is remote from the concrete needs of man. By rigidly separating duty from impulse the strictly moral consciousness prevents the achievement of any ethical purpose, since the carrying out of a moral duty is impossible unless it is in some sense related to personal need. The insistence on the essence of morality as pure duty divorced from emotion and need condemns all moral law to remain in an ideal and unrealizable world:

‘what remains to the self-consciousness that is other than the object is the disharmony of the consciousness of duty and of reality, even its own reality. The proposition is as follows: there is no self-consciousness that is both real and morally perfect; and since the moral *is* only in so far as it is perfectly – since duty is a pure, unmixed *a priori* and morality consists exclusively in commensurability with this purity – then the conclusion must be that there is no moral reality (*dass es kein moralisch wirkliches gibt*).’<sup>73</sup>

The moral consciousness fails to understand the mode of man’s involvement in the historical process when it elevates the individual’s isolated dedication to a moral idea above the duties he has as part of a community. Ethical behaviour is much more involvement in an accepted set of social practices than an attempt to realize a universal code of perfection. At the same time, the changes in the structure of ethical life that history gives rise to are effected by the work of world-historical individuals in opposing a new moral code to the accepted ethical life of their day. The world-historical individual is the man whose particular end coincides with the substantial purpose of the *Weltgeist* (world-spirit). His work is ruthlessly directed towards one end and obeys the

will of the *Weltgeist* rather than the moral laws of the society in which it is performed. The moral censure which such individuals inevitably receive fails to perceive that the work of the world-historical individual seeks to transcend the morality of a particular epoch. Although his work destroys innocent people and holy interests, it is legitimate because it serves the higher purpose of the world spirit. Such a world-historical individual can only be known after the event, because the will of the world-spirit and its purposes in history are known only by reflective retrospection. Hegel's theory of historical action, by concentrating on the world-historical individual as an unconscious servant of the world-spirit, relativizes the role of moral judgement in history as well as restricting consciousness of historical purpose to the past. Man acts on behalf of the *Weltgeist* when he acts according to his particular needs – dedication to great ideals is no more effective:

‘It is not the universal idea which puts itself in danger, which involves itself in conflict and struggle; it keeps itself unharmed and untouched in the background. This can be called the cunning of reason, that it makes the passions work for it.’<sup>74</sup>

The rights of abstract moral duty arise not at every moment of life and in all societies, but preeminently when the ethical world becomes necessary. When the spiritual foundation of culture begins to disintegrate, then moral critique, based on a reference to transcendent norms, acquires validity and possesses at the same time the historical strength to overcome the power of the historically given. In this context moral ideals begin to play a historical role in company with men's particular needs and passions. These moral ideals are then victorious in setting up a new world, which itself becomes established as a new system of social ethics, the true context of individual behaviour. The trans-social validity of moral norms arises at moments of cultural crisis, and is relevant only to a few outstanding individuals. Because divine reason has the power of its own self-realization, then the world is as it should be. The invalidity of the abstract moral consciousness is to posit the power of the finite will to change the structure and drift of development that is in accord with the divine will – a will that is simultaneously the power to enact itself.

‘God rules the world, and the content of his rule, the execution of his plan, is world history. Philosophy wishes to grasp this content, since only what proceeds from it has reality and anything that is not commensurate with it is mere lame actuality. The illusion that the world is a crazy, foolish event disappears before the pure light of this divine idea. Philosophy wants to recognize the content and reality of the divine idea and to justify the reality that is held in scorn, since reason is the perception of the divine work.’<sup>75</sup>

History is not outside the process of divine life: creation is not independent of its creator, but his self-expression, and the awareness of this is the creator's coming to self-consciousness in the mind of man. God's objective reconciliation with the world, that stage of his own development which is realized in empirical history by the event of the incarnation, is the only basis for any substantial ethical life. It has abolished the need, so prevalent in the philosophies and religions of the late ancient world, to set up an ideal life over against the brutality of the *Imperium*. Because this reconciliation gives a new substantial basis to history, because God identified with history in the mode of reconciliation rather than in the mode of alienation, then this history is the progressive realization of reason, and it is this reason which the philosopher attempts to discern.

The spirit remains forever independent of its own historical creations, surviving the concrete life-forms and institutions in which it is expressed. The spirit's transcendence of its own expressions enables it to penetrate further towards achieving its own self-consciousness, since by examining its own life-history it comes to know itself. The path of history is therefore spirit's way to self-consciousness: this cannot be won by simple interior reflection, but must be achieved by the arduous passage through all the concrete forms of history. The final form of this self-consciousness is the activity of the rational mind in contemplating the content of world history. Thought is the spirit's power to have itself as its own object, and this is what is performed in Hegel's philosophy of history. It is the task of the thinking mind to demonstrate that world history is not a matter of simple immediacy but the self-revelation of the spirit. It is implicit in the idea of history as the externalization of the divine life-process that nothing in history is lost, that all is part of the totality of the spirit's life, the development from substance to self-consciousness: 'the moments that the spirit seems to have left behind it, it retains in the depths of its present form.'<sup>76</sup>

Hegel's interpretation of world-history is dominated by his belief that the divine seeks its own realization in the development of finite spirit. The spirit's presence is most evident in the life of the state (objective spirit) and in those forms of activity where man attempts to communicate the life of the divine — in art religion and philosophy (absolute spirit). Since history is the process through which the divine absolute becomes fully self-conscious in man's subjectivity, the chief characteristic of this process must be the evolving harmony of man's secular activity and his response to God in religion. The goal of human development is that the unity with the spirit achieved in religion becomes the foundation-stone of all activity. This is not to imply an institutional merging of sacred and secular, since this can only lead to the corruption of the sacred and the bondage of the secular, but it does abolish any dis-

inction of ethical and spiritual values between the two spheres. Religion is the means by which man first relates to the divine, and in the Christian religion God has revealed himself as he is: the task of history after the life of Christ and his resurrection is to communicate the experience and knowledge of God given to man in Jesus Christ to human society. The overcoming of the gulf between human community and man's religious quest is the historical achievement of Christian Europe.

For Hegel, the coming of Christ was not a divine intervention in history at any arbitrary point. The incarnation was destined to make possible an ethical community that was fully commensurate with the Christian religion: this process could be fulfilled because God had, in the incarnation, identified with all that was finite to the point of overcoming its otherness from himself. The incarnation, then, must occur at the time when finitude was most opposed to the divine, that is when man's religious belief and his secular life were most completely alienated from each other. This is the age of the great pagan philosophies of resignation, of stoicism and scepticism, the age of the Roman empire, in which all human energies were directed towards the exclusive and abstract goal of total rule. For Hegel, Roman religion did not attempt to transform worldly purposes, but rather gave them complete freedom. It was constantly directed towards the legitimation of the pursuit of power. In the Roman world of power, devoid of ethical life, private property rights became the strongest force, with the Emperor as the owner of all. Abstract rule and the unfulfilled idea of the private, possessing individual face each other. Hegel's description of the Roman empire is made in similar terms to that of the late Holy Roman Empire in his youthful writings. All spiritual values are abstracted away from social community, becoming tools of powerful private interests, while man's individuality, divorced from community, loses all definition apart from that of owner of property. This critique was fundamentally similar to that later made by Moses Hess of capitalism and to the Young Hegelian critique of alienation in general. Man's alternative was therefore to welcome the sensuality and violence of the imperial world or to embrace the philosophies of resignation, the purpose of which was 'to make the spirit indifferent to anything that reality gave birth to'.<sup>77</sup> These philosophies, which were able to give the core of man's existence security and endurance against the brutality of the external world, were still condemned to divorce the will from engagement with historical reality.

The immediate context of Christianity was, therefore, the most intense alienation of man's spiritual self-understanding from his material and social environment. The polarization of God and his creation had reached its climax in the Roman empire and it was at this point that God's own life-process intervened in human history, restoring it to a



fundamental union with himself. From the first the incarnation and the Christian religion were linked with the condition of man in his material and social existence. For Hegel, as for Bauer after him, the incarnation was the response of God to the sufferings of the world-soul after the collapse of the Greek and Roman republics. While for Bauer Christianity remained an 'unhappy consciousness', for Hegel its birth was the beginning of a process that could eventually embody the life of the divine spirit in human institutions.

Hegel's youthful amazement at Christianity's victory over the old gods was superseded by his emphasis on Rome's destruction of the social world in which the values of ancient religion flourished. The birth of Christianity was specifically associated with the spiritual pain and emptiness of man, his desolation at the destruction of his ancient communal security. The Roman world was

'the fate which throttled the gods and the carefree life lived in their service, the power which cleansed human character of all particularity. Its situations and its pain were equivalent, then, to the birth-place and birth-pains of another, higher spirit, which was revealed within the Christian religion.'<sup>78</sup>

On the basis of the incarnation, man, rather than being determined by the external and arbitrary events of history, shapes them according to the spiritual foundations of his own nature. Man is liberated from the pressure of history and may begin to transform it in his own image. The freedom and value of the particular individual is the wellspring of history in the world that is reconciled to God.

'Mankind has a foundation of free spirituality which is valid in and for itself, and anything else must proceed from this. The place where the divine spirit is inwardly present, this is the foundation of man's spiritual interiority and is decisive over all contingency.'<sup>79</sup>

For Hegel, it was the historical task of the Germanic peoples to realize this spiritual foundation in the free secular activity of self-consciousness, to give it external form in social institutions and intellectual activity. The acceptance of the Christian principle by the Germanic peoples was, in a formal sense, the implicit conclusion of history, since contact with new peoples was no longer to be the determining principle of history. Once the Christian principle had been accepted by the Germanic peoples the fundamental motive force of European history became the conflict between Church and state. This tension, the struggle of the implicit reconciliation of God and the world as expressed in the religious community with the institutions of the unreformed world of secular power, expressed the efforts of the absolute to overcome the character of religion as an isolated worship of the transcendent and to

establish the concrete Kingdom of God. While the Church consolidated itself on the basis of the absolute truth it lay claim to, the state derived strength from human subjectivity, the desires and needs of man as an historical agent. The spiritual battle of history between the subjective will of man and the substantial unity of God and man achieved in the incarnation is expressed in the institutional battle between Church and state.

The understanding of the truly spiritual character of modern political institutions was essential for Hegel as a defense against the claims of political romanticism. His central concern in discussing the relationship between religion and the state is to provide a justification for the complete institutional independence of the state from the Church and from religious movements in general. For Hegel, it is the 'enormous error of our times' to consider religion and the state as two spheres having no mutual importance or even as quite irrelevant to each other.<sup>80</sup> The state and religion must be based on the same principles if a harmonious life together is to be possible. The true definition of their relationship can only be reached by returning to their concept. Religion deals with the absolute truth, demanding that all aspects of spiritual life should find their justification in this truth. It is therefore the basis of ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) itself, the divine spirit active through subjectivity in the world, developing an organized and particular life in the state. Although the state is ultimately based on religion it wins complete institutional independence from it, just as spirit passes from subjective feeling to the articulate rationality of the external world. To remain on the level of religion is to restrict consciousness to essence in opposition to existence, to abstract morality in opposition to ethical life.<sup>81</sup> To base the state on religion is to give it over to insecurity, since religion is inherently a realm where the worldly is accidental and transient, while the state must be inspired by the urgency of concrete and particular events.

For Hegel, the most fundamental argument for religious rule is based on a concept of the state as a mere mechanism, a device of power employed to deal with the realm of chaos and sin which is the world. Only the Church partakes of spiritual life and response to the spirit can be achieved only by renunciation of the world. Hand in hand with this concept of religion goes a subjectivist piety, weak enough in its failure to realize religious values in the world but strong in its corrosive effect on rational institutions: 'it is not strength but weakness which has in our times made religiosity a polemical species of piety'.<sup>82</sup> The consequence of this is to see the state merely as the protector of law and order, void of ethical life — it follows that the ideals of reason and freedom developed by religion and philosophy cannot be realized within secular life but only in subjective and other-worldly piety, restricting man's spiritual definition to his membership of the religious community. Yet the

subjective relationship to God as the divine indwelling spirit is not sufficiently articulate to determine the content of the rational state: the totality of religious feeling can only see the particularity of secular law as restrictive, finally destroying it in favour of a false concept of the just and the damned, degenerating to a fanaticism which destroys all forms of law as restrictive of the freedom of the spirit.<sup>83</sup> Religion, claiming to be a source of strong rule, instead sets up institutions of unfreedom and ethical corruption.<sup>84</sup> Religious feeling, like the absolute freedom of the revolutionary terror, cannot understand the articulation of rationality within the secular world and abandons it to arbitrariness and chaos by destroying the firmness of law with the criterion of subjective allegiance.

For Hegel, spirit has won independence for secular life through

‘the giant stride from inwardness into the external world, the building of reason into reality, which all of world-history has worked on – a labour which has won for cultivated humanity the reality and consciousness of rational existence, the institutions of political life and the laws.’<sup>85</sup>

If the ‘system of right is the world of freedom made actual’ then it is only possible when thought has the power to leave the realm of religious devotion and become secular wisdom, drawing the spirit into the real world and freeing all its potential for self-realization.

Religion and the state, then, draw nourishment from the same source, embodied as absolute truth and as ethical life. Both must be inspired by reason and freedom to co-exist harmoniously. Churches resting on the basis of authority and subjective other-worldliness can only do harm to the freedom of the secular world. For Hegel, only the Protestant churches embody the same ethical life as the rational state. The Reformation itself made possible the development of a form of religion that could recognize the state’s role in ushering reason into the world. It was the state, not the church, that first promoted the freedom of knowledge and scientific thought, protecting reason from the restrictions of faith and authority. Only with the breaking up of the universal Church was the state able to emerge as the dominant form of modern ethical life. For Protestantism, belief is based on free subjective assent and it is this identification of self-consciousness and universal truth which is the basis of the rational state. In Catholicism, in Hegel’s view, self-consciousness relates to truth externally, spirit opposes subjectivity. From this theological externality flows a Church structure of hierarchy rather than community: the laity is given the truth by members of a separate caste, who do not themselves achieve it by a spiritual process, but rather by the external act of ordination.<sup>86</sup>

When religion rests on a basis opposed to the principle of the free state, it must be suppressed and restricted to a limited sphere, even while

still holding its universal pretensions. For the believer this divorces religion from worldly life altogether, limiting it to subjective piety. For Hegel, besides creating an intense contradiction in the individual's spiritual life and practical behaviour, Catholicism eliminates the support free religious beliefs can give to the citizen's allegiance to the state, when his intellectual level is incapable of achieving a higher philosophical insight into its necessity.<sup>87</sup> A state confident of its own secular strength can encourage its citizens in their religious worship, respecting the free choice of creed, even to the extent of tolerating those sects which refuse normal civic duties.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. THE UNION OF DIVINE AND HUMAN SUBJECT IN SACRED AND SECULAR

##### a. *The division of sacred and secular: the 'unhappy consciousness' and 'absolute freedom'*

For Hegel, subjectivity was what distinguished the life of the modern world from antiquity. The unquestioning obedience and cultural uniformity of the ancient world had given way to man's self-consciousness of his own rights as an individual, of his need to submit every demand of external authority to the test of his own reason and conscience. This subjectivity, in Hegel's view, was won for man by the development of the Christian religion. The modern state, which had subjectivity as its active principle, was the expression of the spiritual status that secular community could achieve now that the meaning of Christianity had been fulfilled. In the state, the subject came to a creative relationship with a rational and organic order that had only become possible after the permeation of the world by the spirit, the ultimate consequence of the union of God and world in the incarnation:

'The right of the subject's particularity, his right to be satisfied, or in other words the right of subjective freedom, is the pivot and centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times. This right in its infinity is given expression in Christianity and it has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilization.'<sup>89</sup>

In Hegel's philosophical system, the state had an intimate yet independent relationship to the religious community (*Gemeinde*). Subjectivity had first been given its true value in the spiritual communion of the religious community: in it each person attained infinite worth since he had been united with the living spirit, the same spirit who deter-

mined the course of history. This subjectivity had, after a long historical dialectic, been expressed in the moral and political form of the rights of man and had subsequently been given a substantial context in the ethical life of the rational state. This state recognized that the source of subjectivity lay in religion but at the same time insisted on the freedom of the secular order from any kind of ecclesiastical influence.

Subjectivity, then, was the essence of both the religious community and the rational state. Both depended on the elimination of positivity, of any kind of religious dogma or arbitrary political authority that could not be given genuine internal assent by the free mind. In both, individual subjectivity was willingly incorporated into a substantial order which could give content and expression to its freedom. To be fruitful, then, subjectivity depended on the harmonious co-existence of true religion and of the rational state. In a world where religion and secularity were at odds, subjectivity remained barren and unconstructive. In the Roman world, where arbitrary and despotic political power reduced the secular world to vice and egoism, subjectivity had to seek fulfilment in other-worldly religious philosophies which necessarily renounced any hope of permeating the world with an ethical order. Where Christianity itself remained sectarian and dogmatic, subjectivity was crushed by the weight of religious positivity.

The fruition of subjectivity in the interdependence of the rational state and the religious *Gemeinde* was preceded by its painful division in a world where religion and secularity were at odds. Two of the forms of life discussed in Hegel's *Phenomenology* express this division, as well as anticipating the types of criticism that Hegel's own work would be subjected to soon after his death. For the 'unhappy consciousness', the divine takes the form of a transcendence which can never permeate and ennoble the secular world. It is that form of subjectivity which experiences itself as dust and ashes in the face of an alien and transcendent God. The awareness of the absolute serves only to remind the subject of his own nothingness: he finds the secular world devoid of meaning and can see no evidence of the life of the spirit within it. The subjective desire for 'absolute freedom', by contrast, is the political form of a consciousness gone to the other extreme: while the unhappy consciousness projected all significance into a transcendent realm, the man of absolute freedom hopes to be able to reduce his social environment to exact conformity with the dictates of his own self-consciousness. Building on the negativity of Enlightenment rationality, he understands politics as the radical negation of all the structures of the past, as the denial of any meaning that is not the immediate product of his own mind. The 'unhappy consciousness' and 'absolute freedom' can be taken as symbols of the critique made of Hegel in the 1840's. For Kierkegaard, Christian faith depended on a painful awareness of the gulf between

God and the world, while for the Young Hegelians the philosophical discernment of the work of the spirit in history must be overcome by man's self-liberating action.

In the section of the *Phenomenology* entitled the 'unhappy consciousness', Hegel describes the religious attitude which has its root in the abandonment of subjective self-confidence. The unhappy consciousness understands its relation to the absolute as the contrast of utterly simple and unchanging substance and the ephemeral, worthless circumstances of worldly existence. Man's consciousness of God is of a remote perfection which condemns his own life to nullity:

'His consciousness of life, of his existence and action, becomes the pain of existence and of action, since in them he has only the consciousness of true being as the opposite of himself, and of his own nothingness.'<sup>90</sup>

Man's image of God is of a stern judge, who demands the worshipper's abandonment of inner-worldly affairs. The self-movement of the absolute leads eventually to its transformation from alien and abstract transcendence into the form of concrete and visible individuality, but this does not in itself abolish the unhappy consciousness. The total otherness of the Jewish God is replaced by the positivity of the historical Jesus: a historical individual remains only an external fact which must disappear into the distance of the past. To attempt to relate to the divine only as sheer historical individuality is as remote from the inner needs of subjectivity as the relation to a remote and unchanging Beyond. The ideal of 'contemporaneity' with the living Jesus in his sufferings at the hands of the world, which Kierkegaard was to put at the heart of his own Christianity, is for Hegel a form of positivity. Only the work of the spirit can realize the meaning of the incarnation, transforming it from a set of historical data that has no inner relation to subjectivity into the universal act of reconciliation of God and the world:

'When sought as individuality, it is not a universal, intelligible individuality, not a concept, but rather an object, a particular thing – an object of immediate sense certainty and therefore something which has disappeared. Only its grave can now become present to consciousness.'<sup>91</sup>

Only when man's search for the divine as an historical datum, as an object of sense-certainty, has failed, can man begin to discover the divine individual in its truth as the universal. The growth of the power of the spirit in the world is the overcoming of the unhappy consciousness and the fulfilment of the absolute, revealed religion. For Hegel, the Christian religion only achieved this comprehension of the divine as a living universal spirit in the Protestant Reformation. The medieval Catholic Church had become more and more involved in externality: this was

expressed not only in its increasing material wealth and power, but also in its concept of the liturgy. Rather than being the cultivation of the subjective individual's awareness of his own identity with the spirit within him, the liturgy became the granting of spiritual favours by a hierarchical caste. The Church accepted the medieval secular world in all its barbarity, isolating the spirit within the walls of its monasteries: this conflict of spiritual and secular was, for Hegel, a dialectical condition for the eventual substantial reconciliation of God and the world in a spiritualized secularity that had subjectivity at its root. The effect of the alienation of spiritual truth from the temporal world was the medieval cult of miracles and relics: the natural and spiritual are united not as wholes but exclusively through minute and arbitrary interconnections. The end point of this process was the Crusades, the attempt to find the presence of Christ concentrated in the Holy Sepulchre. This was the medieval form of the unhappy consciousness, the obsession with the immediacy of the historical Jesus, the end-point of the external objectification of belief.

The result of the failure of the Crusades was that Christianity discovered that the union of God and the world was to be found in each man, in the subjective consciousness: 'the spirit, unsatisfied in its longing for the most explicit sensuous contemporaneity, withdrew into itself.'<sup>92</sup> The meaning of Lutheranism was the understanding of faith as an inward and spiritual relationship between the individual and God, making free subjectivity a universal force capable of giving concrete form to the spirit in the secular world. Because of this, the Reformation was the foundation of the modern state, which is nothing but the 'manifestation of religion in the circumstances of reality'.<sup>93</sup>

'Consciousness, through the achievement of this reconciliation, has made secularity capable of holding the truth, whereas it formerly passed as simply evil, incapable of the good, which remained in the heavenly beyond. Now it is realized that the ethics and right of the state are also divine, the commandment of God, and that there is, according to content, nothing higher or more holy.'<sup>94</sup>

In the Reformation, then, Christianity overcame the effects of the unhappy consciousness and rid itself of positivity. Religious subjectivity, rather than seeking God exclusively as a remote refuge from a sinful world, who demanded the individual's abandonment of rationality and community, now related to the living and world-transforming spirit. Man as believer could begin to see belief as an affirmation of subjectivity. Yet, even after the Reformation, subjectivity and substance, religion and secularity, remained unreconciled. The subjectivity of man as believer had been affirmed, but the rights of his subjectivity within the secular world had yet to be won. Man as a rational and autonomous

agent had still to come to full independence, to re-cast the world in his own image. Subjectivity's alienation from divine substance had been overcome in the Reformation, but its relationship to the secular world had still to pass through the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the excesses of absolute freedom in the French Revolution in order to achieve the reconciliation with reason in history which is the modern state.

The unhappy consciousness was a religious form of subjectivity which was cut off from secular community. Absolute freedom, the political form of the radical Enlightenment, by contrast, insists on the secular world as truth and attempts to destroy the other-worldly. In the alienated world of the *ancien régime*, critical secular thought emerges as a variant of subjectivity which is at odds with belief:

‘Withdrawn into itself out of the spiritlessness and self-dissolution of the world, the spirit, according to its truth, retains, in its undivided unity, its character both as absolute movement and negativity and as self-contentment and positive repose. But since the spirit is determined by alienation, these two moments part as a split consciousness.’<sup>95</sup>

‘Pure insight’, the spirit as the growth of critical self-consciousness, clashes with the response to the spirit as the substantial basis of reality which is belief. Belief, on the other hand, is the response to this substance as not yet realized in the world, not yet fully embodied in the human consciousness. The spirit as ‘pure insight’ is the subjective ego, while belief seeks the spirit as substance in its ‘calm self-identity’. Insight’s ability to critically dissolve actuality is not complemented by the provision of a new spiritual substance for its transformation. Belief’s lack of insight, on the other hand, eventually restricts it to the sensuous mode of religious image-making (*Vorstellung*). The object of belief is seen as transcending the world in which the self is capable of action. For the negativity of pure insight the objectivity of the world under its examination has the character of a ‘negative content, which overcomes itself and is absorbed by the self, that is, only the self is its own object, or the object has truth only in so far as it takes up the form of the self.’<sup>96</sup> For belief, in contrast, the concept, rather than becoming present in the world, remains ‘the inward, which is all things and creates all things, but which does not itself come forth.’

The tendency of pure insight is therefore to reduce all objects to elements of its own consciousness and to make this self-consciousness the universal possession of man. It calls on all men to be self-consciously rational. The activity of pure insight is necessarily directed against belief, the opposing form of consciousness of the spirit. Belief and insight do not perceive their common roots in the spirit and their complementarity. Insight realizes itself only through the process of



negation, through opposition to actuality. Its simplicity is its power: because it is at root related to belief, the Enlightenment, the fully developed form of 'pure insight', is able to pervade the atmosphere in which belief lives. At the same time it must recognize that the essence of belief, its absolute, is itself a notion of God which reflects a rational consciousness. The crude version of the Enlightenment, its attack on priestly deception and superstitious hocus-pocus, must be abandoned if the Enlightenment is to understand itself. The object of faith, however alien its form, is the absolute ground of reason that the Enlightenment searches for. The fulfilled Enlightenment recognizes that the actuality it attempted to destroy, the forms of religious belief, held the sources of its own inspiration.

The Enlightenment attacks belief for its dependence on the facts of history, its acceptance of the supernatural origins of worldly events, but in this the Enlightenment does not yet have critical self-awareness. The Enlightenment believes that all otherness, all empirical reality is alien to itself: it does not yet realize that all knowledge has its origin in the experience of man in history. The Enlightenment cannot yet see that its role is to universalize and conceptualize the content of belief, not to deprive it of its foundations. Belief rejects the claim of the Enlightenment that it rests on historical externality, maintaining that its own consciousness is self-sufficient. By unifying itself with the spirit in the *Gemeinde*, belief overcomes the limitations of the unhappy consciousness. The attempt by belief to give historical evidence for itself is a sign that it has already been overcome by the Enlightenment. In fact the essence of belief, its foundation, is contained in the presence of the spirit to the believing community, which is a living entity and does not need to abstract from itself to find a historical justification.

The Enlightenment's reduction of the world to an object of critical self-consciousness finds its logical conclusion in the principle of utilitarianism. When applied to the historical world in the French Revolution, critical insight implies the negation of the given and finally absolute freedom to realize its own content through the destruction of external reality. The principle of absolute freedom is that for the self-consciousness 'its self-certainty is the essence of all mental entities, of the real and the super-sensuous world . . . all reality is simply mental; to it the world is exclusively its own will, which is a universal will.'<sup>97</sup> The independent existence of a world outside the ego is abolished. The logic of this process is to abolish all the divisions of spiritual activity and of social life. The only remnant of objective being, independent of the all-powerful ego, is the empty *être suprême* of deism and of Robespierre's revolutionary cult. The action of social negation is a dialogue within self-consciousness itself 'in which it allows nothing to take up the character of an entity standing freely over against itself.'<sup>98</sup> The concept

of the general will which is allied to the pursuit of absolute freedom rejects the notion of political representation, insisting that each individual must play a directly participatory role in the general activity, identifying himself with it absolutely. The self must remain fluid, dissolving any objective institutional order. But action, as the result of subjective will, can only be the work of one individual. Since the masses must therefore be excluded from positive decision making, the general will can only take a negative form. The lesson of the terror which follows is to reveal the destructive potential of a subjectivity which understands freedom purely as the critical dissolution of all historical forms.

What the attempt to realize absolute freedom revealed was the one-sidedness of the critical, self-sufficient intellect. Reacting to belief's refusal to build rationality within the world, the critical intellect lost all sense of the independence of the world from the projects of self-consciousness. The failure of the attempt to achieve absolute freedom will eventually make possible a union of the negativity of insight and of belief's response to spiritual substance: insight will perceive its own relationship to absolute substance and belief will accept the rational reformulation of its sensuous content in a system of concepts united by necessity. This harmony will also be achieved in history and politics: while faith perceives that its content can be realized on earth in the ethical life of the rational state, the free mind becomes aware that subjectivity fulfils itself in the development of a rational and objective order, rather than in the assertion of pure and ultimately nihilistic freedom. Thus the French Revolution, for Hegel, is followed by the development of a rational state which has the absolute at its foundation and which can be freely assented to by subjectivity.

#### b. *Subjectivity in the religious community and the rational state*

The unhappy consciousness and the desire for absolute freedom were two expressions of the alienation of the subjective self-consciousness from absolute substance. In the first case, this substance is the divine object of religious belief; in the second case, it is the historical rationality of the state, the 'absolutely rational element in the will'. These two variants of alienated subjectivity express not only the division between self-consciousness and substance but also the division between religion and secularity. They represent religion as the rejection of rationality and community and secular thought and action as the destroyer of sacred icons, the repression of the rights of belief. The purpose of Hegel's philosophical system was to demonstrate that the reconciling activity of the *Weltgeist* had overcome this destructive conflict: in the

world which he saw emerging in the post-Napoleonic age, Hegel was confident that subjectivity had given itself a firm foundation in the substance of the absolute and had at the same time made possible the creative reconciliation of religion and the secular order. Subjectivity had achieved an infinite grounding in the religious community and could express this in a secular form in the rational state.

The *Gemeinde* is a spiritual and communal continuation of the event of the incarnation. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the passage of God's life from immediacy to universality, from the beloved focus of the apostolic community to the divine spirit of history. The dead friend of the apostles is recognized as the God-man, and this is the source of the transition from a close-knit group of friends to a wider religious community. The formation of this community is, for Hegel, a process that can be understood in terms of religious imagery or in terms of a rational dialectic. The death of Jesus and the growth of the community of believers is the 'negation of the sensuous "this one"'.<sup>99</sup> The immediate particularity of the incarnation is once for all, so that it must inevitably disappear into the past and be universalized into the immanence of the spirit. The passage from the person of Jesus to the coming of the spirit is the passage from the empirical events to the inwardness of the substratum of history. The disappearance of the empirical individuality of the incarnation is the occasion for the growth of the universal consciousness of the *Gemeinde*, which must be understood as a universal subject:

'in the disappearance of the immediate existence of He who is known to be the absolute, immediacy receives its negative moment; the spirit remains as reality's immediate selfhood, but now rather as the universal self-consciousness of the religious community, which reposes in its own substance, just as the community is a universal subject in the spirit; not the individual *qua* individual, but together with the consciousness of the community, with what he signifies for the community, is the whole of the matter.'<sup>100</sup>

The *Gemeinde*, accepting the death of Jesus, leaves the immediate empirical past and accepts the presence of the spirit which contains both past and future. The comforter comes when 'the empirical events in their immediacy are past.'<sup>101</sup> Rather than leading the believer to concentrate on the strict historicity of the life of Jesus, the spirit, as the new form of God's life, leads him to a deeper subjectivity in union with God, a union made possible by the death of God as transcendent substance. This subjectivity in the spirit is the foundation of the infinite value of each individual, once he has taken the step away from his natural self. This infinite foundation to subjectivity is not achieved through the individual's own strength of mind, in contrast to ancient stoicism, but constantly gives up its own particularity and has value only in this self-

sacrifice. The love it experiences has its corollary in the pain of self-denial. The subject receives the blessing of the infinite status of citizen of the Kingdom of God only once he is prepared to sacrifice his natural worth:

‘all immediacy, in which man may have had worth, is cast aside; man derives worth only mediately, but this worth is infinite, and in this mediation subjectivity becomes infinite, is in and for itself. Man *is* only through this process of mediation, not immediately. Only so is he capable of having worth, but this capability, this possibility, is his positive, infinite definition.’<sup>102</sup>

This infinite status of man is the only authentic basis for human freedom: Roman law proceeded from a positive standpoint of rights and duties, having no conception of man’s transcendent value. This subjectivity can only be achieved through suffering motivated by love, which has its objective form in the passion of Christ.

In the religious community, individual subjectivity remains implicit. The apparent multiplicity of believers is transformed into the overwhelming, unifying presence of the spirit. The unity of individual subjects, achieved by the sacrifice of particular hopes and intentions, is not a worldly association, where each individual retains rights and duties over against others, as in the realm of contract, of the private citizen and his pursuits, but rather ‘absolute unity in the spirit. This love is precisely the essence of the spirit.’<sup>103</sup> Jesus Christ is the focus and object of faith: his historical individuality is worshipped as the event from which the community grew. Jesus lived in the distance of the past, but the influence of the spirit brings the believer close to the risen God-man who has made possible his own union with God. The spirit as mediator between the believer and the object of his faith in the historical Jesus becomes the foundation of the believer’s own consciousness. The spirit and the community become identified, so that the spirit is authentically revealed in the unified act of worship and the members of the community lose all natural finitude in their identification with the indwelling, permeating spirit.

‘The true determination of the nature of the spirit, the unification of an infinite polarity – God and the world, me, this manikin – this is the content of the Christian religion, what makes it the religion of the spirit, and this content is present in it for the ordinary, uncultivated consciousness.’<sup>104</sup>

Hegel’s understanding of religious worship is explicitly sacramental: God is really present as spirit in the midst of the worshipping community, re-enacting the events of divine life. Because the spirit is the universalization in time and space of the reconciliation which God achieved with creation in the incarnation, its character is ‘utterly contemporary

and demands a fulfilled present'.<sup>105</sup> This presence is made concrete to the believer in the sensuous enjoyment of the eucharist, which for the Lutheran is a true presence of Christ to the believer, avoiding what for Hegel are the extremes of transsubstantiation – a merely factual presence independent of the mind and heart of the believer – and the reformed doctrine of a memorial service which would deny the presence of the incarnation within the *Gemeinde*. The sin against the holy spirit is the destruction and denial of this overcoming of the infinite contradiction between God and the world. 'The sphere of the religious community is the authentic realm of the spirit',<sup>106</sup> the foundation of the 'universal community' of the world as the Kingdom of God, a kingdom which has 'real contemporaneity, and is not merely futurity'.<sup>107</sup> The subject becomes himself spirit, member of the Kingdom of God, only if he allows the process of divine life to be realized in himself. All men can undergo the process of reconciliation as long as it is realized that it has already been objectively accomplished, a historical fact that has only to be made self-conscious by the subject.

Because the absolute has acted to re-integrate itself in history, evil has been overcome once and for all. Since the substance of history now reflects the will of the immanent divine, the battle between good and evil has been decided. The objective reconciliation ('*an sich Versöhnung*') of God and his creation implies the conquest of evil, the end of irreducible, unrepentantly natural finitude. Man's life need no longer be a struggle against evil in the sense that it was in the ancient world: man's task now is to identify with the spirit in history and in his own consciousness. Since evil has been overcome in essence 'if only the subject can make his own will good, then evil, the evil deed, disappears. This is the consciousness that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven, once the natural will is overcome.'<sup>108</sup> Morality is no longer the attempt to re-fashion the world, to conquer an evil reality: since reality itself has been rid of the power of evil, the duty of the subject is to re-enact this victory in his own consciousness, to resolve to identify himself with the work of God in history.

The world, created nature, is potentially the *locus* of the Kingdom of God, which enters it through the *Gemeinde*. The spirit must relate to human feelings and interests, to all the concrete aspects of human activity – and this it can only do through the human subject. In the religious community, the subject has achieved a reconciliation with God in sacramental worship. Yet this reconciliation is still abstract in the sense that the subject remains part of a wider secular world which remains alienated from the spirit. Evil has been defeated in the incarnation, but its defeat must be enacted in universal history by the spirit-filled subject. To abandon the world to evil and share in the joy of religious community as a self-contained sect leaves the process of divine life unfulfilled.

The subject is the bridge between the inward-turning community of faith and the world: as the object of divine grace, as reconciled with the spirit, the subject has infinite worth and in his movement from the *Gemeinde* to the world he must be recognized as possessing inviolable freedom and dignity. The institutions of the secular world must consequently be founded on the basis of this subjectivity.

'The spirit is the truth of worldliness especially because the subject, as the recipient of divine grace, as an entity that is reconciled with God, has infinite value simply from this definition, a value which is then enacted in the religious community.'<sup>109</sup>

Man's status in society and politics is spiritual: it is judged not from a consideration of 'nature', from an acceptance of what is empirically observed to be the disposition of man to self-interest and conflict, but rather from the relationship to God that man can achieve and which can impart to him an infinite definition. Once the religious community has sufficiently developed, it can begin the historical task of realizing the Kingdom of God within the world. Since the incarnation has occurred and has ushered forth the spirit into the world, the process of divine life has entered into its last and final phase. This phase is the work of thousands of years, but it has the potential to bring God to that full self-consciousness which is implicit in human subjectivity's highest spiritual achievements.

This reconciliation of spirit with the world must pass through inferior forms before secularity can reach the same spiritual level as the *Gemeinde*. The *Gemeinde* relates to the world first of all in the mode of renunciation, preserving its own reconciliation with God within itself, abstracted from and rejecting worldliness, so that the 'spirit renounces the world, takes up a negative relationship to it and at the same time to itself, since the world is the subject's drive towards nature, sociability, art and science.'<sup>110</sup> Thus the religious attempt to contain the subject in the concentrated and undeveloped life of the monastery must fail, since the spirit moves towards the full realization of the subject's potential within the world. In the second mode, religion and the world relate while remaining external to each other: religion, already reconciled with the spirit, attempts to rule a world which it sees as the realm of brutality and arbitrariness, incapable of reconciliation. Yet this attempt to arrest the secularization of spirit, to suppress worldliness by religion, results only in the corruption of religion itself: 'the ruling power takes this worldliness to itself; all inclinations, all passions, all spiritless worldliness enters the Church through this rule itself, since the worldly is not yet reconciled in itself.'<sup>111</sup> Alienation and unfreedom thus remain the law of the social world, since the life of the spirit has been restricted to the religious other-worldly and precisely because of this stagnates even

within the Church itself. For Hegel, both the 'sectarian' and 'Church triumphant' relationships of religion to secularity fail to do justice to the world-transforming potential of subjectivity grounded in the spirit.

Finally, the spirit realizes itself within the world as *Sittlichkeit*: the principle of freedom goes out from the religious sphere to permeate the secular world, and inner-worldly activity becomes spiritual in its own right. The holiness of the monastery and of celibacy is transformed into the ethical life of family, civil society and the state, which itself merits the title of 'earthly divine' (*irdisch göttliches*) because it represents the culmination of this process of world-transforming spirit. The divine will, the spiritual experience of the *Gemeinde*, receives a concrete and articulated form in a living world of social ethics. This ethical life fulfils the reconciliation of God and the world in the life of the political community. If the spirit is immanent in the world and this immanence is expressed in man's capacity for ethical community, then this community can be seen as the concrete form of God's presence in the world. The state is therefore the vehicle through which the world and the divine spirit are ultimately reconciled

'since its foundation is the divine will, the law of right and of freedom. The true reconciliation, through which the divine realizes itself in the realm of reality, consists in the ethical and lawful life of the state: this is the true disciplining of worldliness.'<sup>112</sup>

For Hegel, then, both the religious community and the rational state are communities in which subjectivity is identified with the absolute. The Protestant *Gemeinde* overcomes the anguish of the unhappy consciousness since it perceives God as present in the world, as the foundation of the spiritual life of each subject. Rather than binding the individual's life to a set of laws or practices that can have no inner relation to his own needs and rationality, the religion of the spirit reinforces the subject's self-confidence and re-affirms his ties with his human environment. Once the subject is prepared to give up all that is atomistic and self-centred, to renounce the appeal to particular conscience as the ultimate justification of action, he can find a firm foundation in the universal life of the spirit which is the inner core of the *Gemeinde*. In a similar way, the state offers a creative context for subjectivity, calling it away from its tendency to be 'abstractly self-determining in its own inwardness in opposition to the universal'.<sup>113</sup> The ethical life of the state, like the life of the religious community, gives the subject's own will content and fulfilment: it unites the subject with the divine through the mediation of the universal, of community. In the rational state, subjectivity overcomes the one-sidedness of abstract, Kantian morality and can relate to historical reason as present and actualized. This is the condition

of genuine community, since only a shared rationality with which all citizens freely identify themselves can prevent the extremes of monolithic despotism and anarchy emerging. Only subjectivity can give life to universal right (*das Rechtliche*), but only community can evolve this universal right as an objective context for subjectivity. Community depends, for Hegel, on the willingness to realize subjectivity in the practice of a given social order, rather than the search for transcendent and divisive ideals. In the ethical life of the state, subjectivity finds an actualized universal:

'The person, as a thinking being, knows this substance to be his own essence, and in this knowledge he ceases to be a mere accident — he regards it as his absolute aim and purpose in reality as well as an achieved present. He fulfils this purpose through his own activity, but yet as something which simply *is*; thus he fulfils his duty as his own and as reality, without reflective choice, and in this necessity he has self-possession and real freedom.'<sup>114</sup>

The unity of subjective will and the rational will of the absolute achieves the ethical whole of the state 'which is the reality wherein the individual has and enjoys his freedom, insofar as it is the knowledge, belief and willing of the universal'.<sup>115</sup> The union of subjective will and the rational state must presuppose, however, the achievement of rationality by the historical process: it can therefore only develop in Hegel's own post-Revolutionary age. Only when the absolute fulfils history in the rational state can the freedom of the subjective self-consciousness be fulfilled in it. Before the emergence of the rational state, man's identification with the absolute can be achieved only in the religious community. The state is the coincidence of freedom and what ought to be, God's will — it is the context in which substance is realized by subjectivity. The individual living in this unity has a significance 'which consists only in this substantiality . . . all value that man has, all spiritual reality, he has exclusively through the state'.<sup>116</sup> The objective reconciliation of God and the world, which has its concrete form in the state, is the basis of the individual's own life, which is valid and creative only insofar as it attempts to unify its own will with the universal will expressed in the ethical institutions of the state.

The harmony of religion and humanism is achieved in the objectification of God's reconciliation with the world in a secular institution which expresses the immanent divine spirit. The final synthesis of the religious foundation of human subjectivity and the life of man in community is the rational state which has its foundations in God's reconciliation with the world, which is anticipated by the religious *Gemeinde*, but which represents a concrete and visible form of the spirit in which all can participate and which transcends the necessarily limited bounds of the religious liturgy.



The freedom that the state offers is not, for Hegel, to be confused with 'subjective will and arbitrariness': it depends rather on an insight into the universal will, into the structure of the concept which it is the task of social life to realize.

'The subjective will is a completely formal concept, which does not include at all *what* it wills. Only the rational will is the universal which determines itself and develops out of itself and which unfolds its moments as part of an organic whole.'<sup>117</sup>

The meaning of freedom is for the subjective finite will to unite itself with the substantial will of the divine in history, which is expressed in external institutional form in the state: freedom must have a content and this content can be found only in the context of social institutions. To define freedom simply as the exercise of subjective will without qualification is to define man as no different from the state of nature. Freedom is defined in the context of social duty: it is the willing identification with and realization of what is objectively right, and the content of this right is defined by the development of reason in history, irrespective of the wishes of finite will, but dependent on the moment of subjectivity for its realization. The individual's dignity is grounded in political community, just as his infinite subjectivity is grounded in the spirit. Since the spirit is both the infinite ground of this subjectivity as well as of the historical reason immanent in the state, then the subject relates to the state in a manner analogous to his relationship to the spirit – 'the subject is thus directly linked to the ethical order by a relation that is more like an identity than even the relation of faith and trust'.<sup>118</sup>

For Hegel, it is the 'calling of the individual to lead a universal life'.<sup>119</sup> The process by which the individual realizes that this is his true vocation in the state is analogous to the development through which man overcame the unhappy consciousness and grasped the existence of the divine as a universal and inner-worldly spirit. At first the subjective self-consciousness can only perceive the absolute truth as an alien transcendent, as a remote perfection that implies the nothingness and evil of the subject himself. Yet once the subject perceives that this perfection has in fact involved itself in the world, has become a concrete historical personality, and, further, has abandoned the positivity of a particular historical form and become a universal spirit which yet remains wedded to the concrete forms of the world, then he knows that this process has brought absolute truth within his own reach: the transcendence of God the Father and the historical remoteness of God the Son are both overcome and fulfilled (*aufgehoben*) in the universal presence of God the Holy Spirit. This perception is the elimination of positivity and the invitation to the subject to take part in the spirit's determination of history.

Yet to unite himself with this spirit, this 'implicitly fulfilled unity of universal and individual', the individual must renounce the prerogatives of the state of nature and undergo the same process of negativity, of renunciation of his own immediacy, as the incarnate God underwent to make possible the emergence of the spirit in its universality:

'His contemplation of self-sufficient truth . . . is also the movement by which he gives up his own will and his character as natural immediacy. Following this example, he withdraws his own self into the pain of the negative and thus knows himself as unified with being.'<sup>120</sup>

Through this process of renunciation the individual subject becomes capable of living the life of the religious community. In a similar way, the ethical life of the state presupposes that the subject has willingly cast off the disposition of the state of nature and accepted the identification of his own will with the divine, absolutely rational will which is expressed in the state, realizing the idea of freedom 'not according to subjective preference, but according to the concept of the will in its universality and divinity'.<sup>121</sup> The movement of embodiment which led from God's transcendence and the resulting unhappy consciousness to God's spiritual presence in the religious community is the same as the movement which leads from the despotic and irrational monarchies of the *ancien régime* – and the consequent desire of the rational self-consciousness to achieve absolute freedom – to the rational state. In both the state and the religious community, the individual can re-discover himself after the renunciation of the state of nature, of the natural tendency to prefer what is exclusively his own. They are both embodiments of the spirit, which require the active participation of individual subjectivity to have presence in the world.

For Hegel, the state is held together by a force stronger than mutual agreement or external law: its principle of unity is essentially the same as the love which makes the members of a family an ethical unity and it derives this spiritual force from the same historically self-revealing spirit who is God present to the subject in the religious community. The notion of ethical life as a concrete form of the historical spirit has its culmination in Hegel's understanding of the state as the secular form of God's presence in the world. As such it is valid irrespective of the particular wills of human individuals. It is the expression of divine subjectivity and realizes itself according to its own laws.

'In understanding freedom, we must not proceed from particularity, from the particular self-consciousness, but rather from the essence of the self-consciousness, since, whether man is aware of it or not, this essence realizes itself as a self-sufficient power, of which particular individuals are only moments. It is God's way in the world, that the state should exist: its foundation is the power of reason realizing itself as will.'<sup>122</sup>

As the embodiment of the rational will, the state is an individual, a spiritual oneness: in its acts and self-knowledge it attempts to draw subjectivity away from the pursuit of exclusively private ends and 'preserve it in substantial immanence'. The state itself is a form of subjectivity: the union of the rational and self-determining will of the *Weltgeist* with human society. Only subjectivity can give life to rational precepts, and it is the nature of the state to ally a system of law to a human community which can give this system life by its free allegiance, obeying its laws as the product of reason. By aligning his own will with the will of the divine, man is able to overcome the gulf between substance and subject: reason is what is willed by the divine subject, and this reason has its institutional form in the state.

'Subjectivity is itself the absolute form and existent actuality of the substantial order and the distinction between subject on the one hand and substance on the other, as the object, end and controlling power of the subject is the same as, and has vanished directly along with, the distinction between them in form.'<sup>123</sup>

It is in the state that the particular individual, natural man, becomes a person, having rights and duties, and this personality is guaranteed and fostered by the state.

## 5. A CRITICAL CONCLUSION: HEGEL'S SYNTHESIS OF RELIGION, RATIONALITY AND COMMUNITY

### a. *Religion and philosophy*

Hegel's youthful writings had contrasted the history of Christianity with the image of life in the Greek *polis* and had concluded that the tragic failure of Christianity lay in its inability to develop a system of ethics and an understanding of social community. Hegel's judgement had been that the worship of divine transcendence was an activity that drew men away from the practical ethical relationships of society, so that religious otherworldliness and political decay must go hand in hand. In his mature published works and lecture cycles, however, a very different judgement is developed — a judgement which is at variance both with the opinions expressed by Hegel himself as a young man and with the interpretations of Hegel made a decade after his death by the Young Hegelians. Whereas the young Hegel had noted the opposition of secular and religious goals, Hegel sought in his mature system to understand the spiritual process that linked religion and secular life, to make it possible for men to maintain their self-understanding of rationality and autonomy and at the same time to be able to relate to the infinite

which was the origin and context of all human aspirations. Hegel's youthful critique had centred on the understanding of God in Judaism and Christianity as transcendent, as a being to be worshipped apart from all social and humane priorities. The mature Hegel hoped, by contrast, to restore the union of secular and religious life by developing an understanding of the divine as immanent in history and ultimately present in the activity of the human spirit, so that the celebration of God's creative presence could also be the act of man defining his own world. To understand the divine as immanent both in history and in the rational speculation of the human mind meant that there could be no special laws governing religious life that were inescapably alien to the rational ethical demands of social existence, and that the pursuit of goals determined by man's autonomy and rationality was not at odds with belief in and worship of the divine who communicated this freedom and rationality most powerfully.

What had motivated the young Hegel to write his long critiques of religion and society was not interest in philosophical analysis and speculation, but rather moral concern. He did not attempt to criticize Judaism and Christianity on epistemological grounds, but rather to judge them in terms of their social, political and cultural consequences. His analysis was in many respects similar to the task that Weber was to set himself in his researches into the sociology of religion: What was the effect of a particular theodicy on the 'secular ethic' of a civilization? While the ancient Greek theodicy, identifying the fate of the individual with that of the community, had developed a flourishing culture, the Christian theodicy of personal immortality in the next world had led to political apathy and subservience. For the young Hegel, an authentic religion must possess the characteristics of rationality, fantasy and community. Without these it became 'positive': rather than encouraging cultural development and political freedom, it acted to suppress them. A 'positive' religion was one based on a set of remote historical facts which had no links with universal rationality. Since these historical events were defined as essential to salvation, belief in them meant that the believer's fundamental spiritual orientation was alien to the culture and rationality of his own society. Since they were facts whose truth could not be communicated by an appeal to universal principles they could be authenticated only by an appeal to authority. This religious authority, in turn, sought to influence culture as much as possible, since it understood the beliefs it itself taught as transcending all worldly concerns. Thus the effect of elevating a set of remote historical events to the sole means of salvation was to encourage general social attitudes of authoritarianism and irrationality. It also devalued the independent cultural development of contemporary societies, since religious symbols from an alien epoch were declared essential to salvation.

The hope of the young Hegel was for a nexus of religion and society that would be expressive of self-confident humanity, in particular for a type of religious cult that would help to cement social bonds rather than to tear communities apart. The key role that philosophy was to have in Hegel's mature works was to provide the link between Christianity and community that could not exist in his youthful writings. Only philosophy could do this because it alone could achieve the degree of insight capable of appreciating the presence of the immanent divine in history and in the doctrines of Christianity. Further, only philosophy could discern the fundamental relationships, present beneath the mutual rejection, that existed between Christianity and the Enlightenment. The urgency of Hegel's youthful writings was determined by his awareness of the fragmentation of contemporary politics and of Christianity's failure to express its saving power as an ethical force capable of transforming society. The resignation of Hegel's mature works stems from a self-assurance of the work of the spirit in history – an assurance derived from his belief that the dialectic of revolution and restoration had made the development of a rational state possible in post-Napoleonic Europe. It was philosophy that had the power to interpret this dialectic: to demonstrate that the processes of the spirit were a unity, whether they were in the unfolding of the historical dialectic or in the pattern of religious worship.

In Hegel's philosophy of religion, the historical attempt to verify the facts of the Gospel must give way to establishing whether or not the event of the incarnation has the ring of truth according to an adequate philosophical understanding of the Godhead. We know that the incarnation is true, for Hegel, because we know from our own reason that the process of divine life implies the trinity.<sup>124</sup> The truth that God is not abstract, as deism conceived him to be, but rather concrete, can be understood by philosophy and only Hegel's system has fully grasped it. Yet philosophy's task is to understand what is, to conceptualize reality, not to posit an ideal process that is enacted only in a transcendent realm. The truth of the trinity is therefore embedded in historical fact, and is only subsequently interpreted by philosophy. The process of divine life is fully comprehensible to philosophy, but philosophy achieves its status as absolute knowledge only after the historical enactment of divine life.

This interpretation of events by philosophy depends on the truth of God's immanence, the spirit itself, being present in man's mind, in the finite self-consciousness, as well as in the events of history. The philosophical recognition of divine providence is therefore part of God's self-knowledge.

‘All truth begins as phenomenon, that is, in the mode of immediacy. The concept must, therefore, be present in men’s self-consciousness. It must be implicit in the spirit and the spirit of history must have apprehended itself in that way. This apprehension is, however, the necessary process of the spirit.’<sup>125</sup>

The relationship of what is implicitly present in creation and history and the work of the human mind in interpreting it is finally a unity since philosophy is not an activity that works over against the immanence of the divine in concrete reality but is the most self-conscious form of that immanence. Philosophy shares the character of spirit: it is

‘the movement which is at the same time knowledge, the transformation of what is implicit to something explicit, of substance into subject, of the object of consciousness into an object of self-consciousness, that is, an object which has been transformed into a concept.’<sup>126</sup>

Philosophy is therefore the achievement through the finite mind of the final stage of the divine life-process, its self-recovery, the unity of being and thought which for Hegel is the true meaning of spirit.

Philosophy cannot come to fruition before the completion of the process of divine life in history. Religion precedes philosophy because it is the immediate response to the events of salvation-history: philosophy, as interpretive activity, must be preceded by the *praxis* of salvation and worship. Yet only philosophy can achieve a full insight into the character of these events of salvation history as moments of a unified necessary process. This process of divine life has the same structure as the reflective processes of conceptual thought and therefore finds its ideal *milieu* in the concept. The religious apprehension of salvation-history as events, as historicity, therefore, is an earlier but also an inferior grasp of the divine nature to that achieved by philosophy:

‘The content of religion enunciates earlier than philosophical science what the spirit is; but only philosophical science is its true self-knowledge.’<sup>127</sup>

If the religious sense of God can be surpassed by an ‘absolute knowledge’ which has a form utterly appropriate to its content, then religion must become a matter of crucial importance only for the unphilosophical.

For Hegel, both rational self-consciousness, which is fulfilled in speculative philosophy, and free subjectivity, which is given a content in the ethical life of the state, derive ultimately from religious experience: the union of the finite subject with the indwelling spirit in the worship of the religious community is the ground from which the freedom and rationality of man within the secular world grow. What is problematic, however, is the meaning and significance of religion in Hegel’s system once philosophy and the state, the two chief forms of secular human independence, achieve maturity. For Hegel, the religious relationship to

God who is transcendent to nature and the human mind, to a person whose involvement with his own creation is not understood to change or develop his own nature, is contrary to the speculative understanding of the divine life-process. Hegel's understanding of God's relationship to man consciously attempts to supersede the religious sense of the holy, since holiness refers to a quality of transcendence that cannot be fully realized in the ethical life of the secular world nor grasped by the human mind. For Hegel, the state is 'holy', yet this usage of the word indicates a clear restriction of meaning: it is 'holy' because it represents the objective form and will of the spirit in the world. Holiness in its transcendent sense is what is rejected by Hegel, most noticeably in his critique of religious practices which are set apart from secular values and institutions, such as monasticism, celibacy and evangelical poverty. Such practices were for Hegel justifiably rejected by the Reformation, and have no value once the secular world has developed family life, commercial activity and the state to a mature ethical level. Speaking of religion before the development of a secular ethic, Hegel writes:

'The unfreedom of the form of knowing and of subjectivity has the consequence for the ethical content, that self-consciousness is not seen as immanent to it, but rather abstracted from it, so that this content is seen as real only as a negation of the reality of self-consciousness. In this untruth the ethical content is called 'holy'. but through the divine spirit's introduction of itself into reality, the liberation of reality in the spirit, that in the world which was called holiness is thrust aside by ethical life.'<sup>128</sup>

As many students of religion, most notably Rudolf Otto, have argued, the sense of the holy for the religious believer is a unique experience which escapes translation into ethical or philosophical terms. Religion is the human activity that attempts to respond to the revelation of the holy and religion itself retains its identity only if the holy is neither fully comprehensible to philosophy nor reducible to the ethical spirit of human institutions. The category of the holy refers to the divine in its sheer ineffability and infinite power — it is, to use Otto's terms, a *mysterium tremendum* which transcends all human attempts at conceptual clarification and domestication.

For Hegel, it was crucial to demonstrate that religion could co-exist harmoniously with rational morality and with free thought. He therefore rejected religious categories which transcended conceptual expression: if the 'holy' was more than philosophy could grasp or ethics could realize, then religion might become a force unconnected with either, an obsession with mysterious powers which would threaten to destroy humane order. If the holy remains ungraspable, will it not threaten to become 'positive' and to foster forms of religious alienation? Yet fear of irrational and inhumane religious phenomena need not lead us to

accept Hegel's interpretation of the relationship between religion, ethics and philosophy: the holy may retain its unique mystery while at the same time acting as the infinite foundation of an ethical and rational order. The *analogia entis*, the understanding of man as fashioned in the image of God, which plays such a crucial role in Hegel's philosophy, need not deny the divine ineffability and the uniqueness of the religious sense of the holy in responding to it. Philosophy's attempt to conceptualize the divine nature does not leave religion with unique status only because religion emphasizes the world of feeling: rather, this conceptualization represents no more than the effort of the finite mind to grasp the infinite, an enterprise which must accept its failure to exhaust the mystery of God.

A crucial dimension of the specifically religious relationship to God is the collection of religious symbols, entities from the natural world which are invested with transcendent content and significance. This, for Hegel, is the level of *Vorstellung*, a level at which sensuous objects and rational concepts are combined in a way which will subsequently allow the elucidation of a necessarily related set of pure concepts. Hegel's interpretation of religious symbolism depends on the belief that the infinite mystery which a symbol points to can be fully expressed in concepts accessible to the finite mind. Yet it is precisely religion's sense of the infinite and unfathomable nature of God which has led to the formation of religious symbolism. It is the ineffability of the divine nature, which prevails simultaneously with the analogy of being, which renders impossible the supersession of religious symbolism by a rational system, even for the philosophical elite.<sup>129</sup>

For W. Pannenberg, in his essay 'Die Bedeutung des Christentums in der Philosophie Hegels', much of the difficulty in Hegel's position can be attributed to the classical doctrine of God itself: Hegel shared with this doctrine the assumption of a necessary essence of God which precedes the exercise of divine freedom. In Hegel's philosophy of religion this has the effect of presenting the concept of God as the highest form of knowledge of God. Yet, for Pannenberg, to know God as subject is not to employ a concept which grasps and expresses an essence, but rather to speak of the infinite freedom of God which precedes all conceptuality:

'to understand God's nature itself as the absolute future of freedom, rather than think of it as a power which is the ground of this freedom. A freedom which is not subordinate to the necessity of a prior essence or nature can only be thought of as an absolute future of freedom.'<sup>130</sup>

Hegel's attribution of the supreme position in his system to the concept affected his understanding of human as well as divine freedom. What



the concept cannot grasp is precisely the contingency of the historical existence of a free subject:

‘the independent rights of the historical in relation to the logical form of the concept and the uncompleted character of all past and present existence, as well as its reference to a still open future, which is therefore an indispensable horizon for the understanding of present reality.’<sup>131</sup>

It was Hegel’s over-estimation of the power of the concept which also led him, for Pannenberg, to misunderstand the unique role of religious symbolism. The historical particularity of religious symbols cannot be brought, without loss of religious meaning, into a necessary conceptual system. It is, for Pannenberg, precisely the symbolic character of religious images which gives freedom of response to individual believers, although, as Pannenberg notes, it was Hegel himself who emphasized the urgent need to develop the profound content of Christian symbols and free them from a dogmatic straitjacket. Hegel’s philosophy demonstrated, in contrast to pietism, the need for Christianity to understand itself in the context of the free and universal exercise of reason: only thus could it continue to exist as the religion of freedom within secular culture.

For Hegel, human existence could only be understood in the context of infinite spirit. The foundation of an authentic humanism was a consciousness of the interrelationship of divine and human action. The finite as sheer finitude was shot through with contradictions which could be resolved only by demonstrating its existence within the infinite. If the relationship between finite and infinite could be compellingly demonstrated by philosophical argument, then it could be willingly appropriated by the free and rational subject. Rather than being a ‘positive’ dogma, imposed by religious institutions, this relationship could be an insight which every free mind could share.

Yet if this rational demonstration should have only plausibility rather than compelling force, then the willingness to accept the infinite as the foundation of human existence must depend not on pure rational insight but on the act of faith. This act is based on the discernment of signs of the infinite within the finite while being unable to present a complete and universally acceptable rational self-justification. While pointing to the incoherence and internal contradictions of finite human existence as evidence of its need for an infinite context, faith cannot demonstrate that this infinite context necessarily exists. It seeks certainty in an eschatological future, remaining content with the terrestrial uncertainty of the discernment of infinite meaning in the ambivalence of the finite. For Hegel, however, if faith was the last word of religion, then religion and modern subjectivity must remain at odds. How could a free

and rational mind accept claims for the infinite significance of events and propositions within a religious system of belief unless these claims could be grounded on a necessary and presuppositionless logic? And, further, how could a rational subject accept the normative status of a system of social laws unless he could perceive that these laws were based on an infinite and creative will? Subjectivity could be fully free only if all positivity in matters religious could be overcome in the concept: this was possible only if the truths of Christianity were exhaustively explicated and grounded in a speculative metaphysics. This, in turn, implied a divine process of necessity, which, further, rid the incarnation of its historical contingency. In his attempt to eliminate the positivity of religion on behalf of rational freedom, Hegel rejected a crucial aspect of Christian faith's own self-understanding, as a free response to a historical event whose divine significance cannot be grounded in necessary reason. If the events of salvation-history had a free, gift-like character, then they were contingent, and this, for Hegel, was ultimately unacceptable, for the reason enunciated by Lessing: 'contingent historical facts can never become a proof for necessary truths of reason'.

The power of speculative reason in demonstrating the necessary inter-relatedness of finite and infinite is crucial to Hegel's system. The present author, however, can only agree with C. Taylor's judgement that Hegel's attempted demonstration of the necessary incoherence of the finite is unsuccessful. If this is so, then

'Hegel's demonstration of his ontology can only have the force of a more or less plausible interpretation of the facts of finitude, the levels of being, the existence of life and conscious beings, the history of man, as 'hints and traces' of the life of an absolute subject, deployed in the world.'<sup>132</sup>

In any reconstruction of Hegel's system, then, the union of Christian belief and free subjectivity can no longer be based on the conviction of the power of metaphysics to give theistic doctrines compelling rational force. This need not, however, imply that faith and subjectivity must accept the fateful estrangement that the young Hegel depicted. Although the ground of faith is not a logical one, it can express itself in actions and values which are compatible with subjective freedom and rational judgement. Although uncertain, it may lay claim to being a meaningful interpretation of the totality of our experience.<sup>113</sup> Whereas, for Hegel, rational certainty was possible in our knowledge of God, since God's own process of self-development had reached its climax in human self-consciousness, faith would postpone such certainty to an eschatological future. Such a shift of emphasis would radically affect the Hegelian system, since a God who can be known in his fullness only in

an eschatological future is a God whose own life is not identifiable with the course of secular history.

Such an understanding of faith would have an affinity with Schleiermacher's interpretation of religion as a foundational relationship to reality which is prior to both theoretical and practical reason: a 'sense and taste for the infinite', a conviction of the life of the finite in the infinite, in which cognitive and affective elements can be discerned only *ex post facto*. Rather than being grounded in rational necessity, faith may demonstrate its reasonableness through the cumulative force of interpretations of our experience as providing evidence for the dependence of the human on the divine, the finite on the infinite. These interpretations can do justice to the values of fruitfulness, coherence and explanatory power in a similar way to those in scientific or humanist disciplines.<sup>134</sup> If this is so, Christian faith would not be 'the absurd', as Kierkegaard was to depict it. It has reasonable status as a meaningful interpretation of reality. Yet the act of faith itself, which transforms theoretical uncertainty into the foundation of all of life's values and commitments, may still be appropriately described in Kierkegaard's words as 'an objective uncertainty, held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness'. Such faith is the 'highest truth attainable for an *existing* individual'.<sup>135</sup>

What then, for Hegel, is the continuing validity of religion in the age of the maturity of philosophy and of the rational state? For the vast majority of men and women, its purpose will remain what it has always been: to be the public celebration of God's reconciling presence in human history and the unification of every individual subject with the indwelling spirit. Once, however, a group of men has emerged in the modern world who are capable of clarifying and purifying religion, of explaining its own consciousness to itself, then a distinction necessarily emerges between the unphilosophical 'faithful' and a philosophical elite which knows rather than believes.

For Hegel, contemporary theology had lost to an alarming degree the capacity to comprehend and teach the unique doctrines of Christianity. Its capitulation to deistic 'understanding' and romantic feeling meant that the rich conceptual content of the truth of the incarnation and the doctrines associated with it remained unexplored. Speculative philosophy had arisen only on the shoulders of religion but its task in the contemporary world was to revive the long neglected truth of the dialectical relationship of finite and infinite that was present in Christianity but which was neglected by theology itself. For Hegel, the contemporary world witnessed the rise of subjective moral opinion and a search for private rights and pleasures similar to the age of the Roman emperors. Since the true, infinite content of religion was no longer preached, the people, who depended on truth as religious symbolism, no longer found

satisfaction for its inner yearnings. The finitude and subjectivity that characterized contemporary theology could not answer the people's desire for meaning. Only philosophy could fill this gap, discerning 'the rose in the cross of the present'.

'The unity of inner and outer is no longer present in reality or in the immediate consciousness, and nothing is justified in belief any longer. This false note in reality has been resolved for us by philosophical knowledge.'<sup>136</sup>

Yet the division between the aspirations of the people and the teachings of religion had grown so great that it threatened to upset philosophy's conviction that reason and reality had become commensurate with each other. Philosophy's grasp of the relationship between human self-determination and the *Weltgeist* would then be less the reflection of how modern man could and did live an integrated life than the insight of an elite into an ideal rationality that was not realized in the collective consciousness of the modern world:

'Yet this reconciliation is itself only a partial one, without external universality; in this respect philosophy is an isolated sanctuary and its servants make up a priesthood set apart, that may not mingle with the world and which must guard the treasury of truth. How the temporal, empirical present will find its way out of its dislocation, what form it will take, is for itself to decide and is not the immediate practical concern of philosophy.'<sup>137</sup>

### b. *History and ethics*

Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment in the *Philosophy of History* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* attempted to reveal their origins in Christian belief and to reject their own self-understanding as destroyers of superstition. At the same time, his interpretation of the history of Christianity, which never lost many of the severely critical themes of his early theological writings, demonstrated that Christianity could only remain faithful to itself by accepting the secular world as a legitimate arena for the realization of its own values. The tension and mutual rejection that had characterized relations between Christianity and secular humanism since the Renaissance was for Hegel part of the development of the spirit in the world but at the same time something that had now been definitely resolved. The full Christian truth could be allied with the intellectual and political activities of modern man. Hegel's mature philosophy had overcome the doubts of his youth, the conviction that 'church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly action, can never dissolve into one'.<sup>138</sup> This achievement retained the age-old foundations of

human security in religion as well as incorporating man's attempts to re-shape both consciousness and society in terms of his own autonomy. The union of religion and secular humanism was also the reconciliation of Romanticism and the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution and the reaction to it. It asserted the existence and power of the divine as well as the freedom and dignity of man.

Hegel's achievement was explicitly based on a fully-developed ontology. It was this ontology, as well as the crucial sequence of events from the French Revolution, through the rise and fall of Napoleon, to the development of the Prussian *Rechtsstaat*, which separated the mature Hegel from the Hegel of the early theological writings, and which made possible such a radically different interpretation of the relationships between religious belief and rational freedom. The goal of the young Hegel had been a moral and social ideal rather than the development of a philosophy, but it was the system of absolute idealism which became the key to Hegel's reconciliation of religion and secularity. Hegel's understanding of the relationship of finite and infinite spirit and of the necessary development of God through the life-stages of self-externalization and self-recovery rendered it impossible for the conflict between reason and faith to remain irreducible. Because the absolute realized itself in the activity of the finite spirit, then religion, the explicit worship of the revealed God through feeling and sensuous images, could not oppose rational thought and secular ethics: man's worship of God in humility could not oppose his own confident and autonomous activity since both were different forms of God's achievement of self-consciousness. The young Hegel's three requirements for religion – rationality, fantasy and community – were fulfilled in his mature thought by three essential and distinct modes of life: religion, philosophy and the ethical life of the state. These achieved unity only through the concept of spirit as developed by Hegel, the union of universal and particular, abstract and concrete:

'Only in the principle of the spirit which knows its own essence, which has implicitly absolute freedom, and which has its reality in the activity of its liberation, is there present the absolute possibility and necessity that the power of the state, religion and the principles of philosophy will resolve themselves into one, a unity which will fulfil the reconciliation of reality with the spirit of the state, with religious conscience, as well as with philosophical knowing.'<sup>139</sup>

Hegel's ontology, then, was intended to make possible the reconciliation of religion and secular humanism. Yet it was this ontology that crucially restricted both the scope of man's self-determining activity and the unique role of religion. Hegel's understanding of reason in history and of the post-Revolutionary world as a fundamental reconcili-

ation of historical conflict necessarily denied the value of social action oriented towards the future. The absolute's achievement of its own purpose through particular passions and interests rendered the attempts of man to change his situation in the light of a transcendent ideal illusory.<sup>140</sup> There is no universal criterion, in Hegel's philosophy, with which to criticize a given historical situation. The world-historical individual has the power and right, granted to him by the *Weltgeist*, to overthrow the ethical life of his own age in favour of a new morality. He is exempt from the condemnation that can be made of all others. But there is no way of discovering, except retrospectively, who is a genuine world-historical individual, and who claims a spurious right to destroy the ethics of his own society. It is not possible for an individual to know whether his moral critique of an ethical culture corresponds to the objective decline of that culture, and is therefore a valid realization in subjectivity of the life-process of the divine in history, or whether, on the other hand, his critique represents no more than the imposition of a subjective moral project on substantial reality, which will be ineffective because it does not correspond to men's particular needs and impulses, or destructive because it ignores the relationship of substance and subject.

Hegel's philosophy does depend on the withering away of less rational and universal forms of ethical life in favour of others, but he does not attempt to set up transcendent moral criteria by which a given form of ethical life may be judged. This is because, for him, the world is fundamentally as it should be. It is not an arbitrary and chaotic conglomeration of events, against which the human mind and will strive to set up its own order, but a profoundly rational self-disclosure of the absolute which employs the essential moment of subjectivity in the finite will for its own purposes. These purposes can never be known by the subjective agent and his own will is completely irrelevant to them:

'All actions, including world-historical actions, culminate with individuals as subjects giving actuality to the substantial. They are the living instruments of what is in substance the deed of the world mind and they are therefore directly at one with that deed though it is concealed from them and is not their aim and object.'<sup>141</sup>

In his *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel criticized the moral theory of Kant and Fichte, which assumed that man's ethical deeds had the role of moulding the clay of a brutal and irrational world. From the standpoint of abstract morality, the finite will is the crucial agent for implanting divine law into reality. If the ethical purposes of man go awry, there is no *Weltgeist* to invest them with a more significant content. Hegel's understanding of the relationship of God and the finite will explicitly rejected this possibility:

'In religion, however, the good, the reconciliation, is absolutely fulfilled and is in and for itself; the divine unity of the spiritual and the natural world – to which latter the particular self-consciousness belongs – is presupposed, and the need to cast off subjectivity and take up and share in this work, which fulfils itself eternally, is only my affair, a need that confronts me alone. Because of this the good is not something which "should be", but rather divine power, eternal truth.'<sup>142</sup>

Hegel's critique of Kant's understanding of morality centred on its abstraction. Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative as the criterion of moral action necessarily gave it an abstract universality, since otherwise it could not be understood as a product of pure reason and therefore as binding. The categorical imperative was intended to give a universal criterion to any rational agent, motivated by duty and unaffected by any subjective impulse except 'respect for the law'. Hegel rejected Kant's understanding of ethics in two fundamental ways: firstly, by insisting that the understanding of man as a rational being was insufficient to ground a normative ethics. Only an understanding of human existence in the context of divine creative will could give normative force to morality. Whereas, for Kant, God plays no part in the foundation of the normative character of moral laws, but is rather postulated as a consequence of moral thinking in connection with the highest good, for Hegel human dignity and the moral norms consequent upon it spring from the relationship between the human subject and the divine spirit. Secondly, Hegel criticized Kant's understanding of moral action as empty of concrete content. While for Kant the very abstraction of the categorical imperative gave it its normative character, for Hegel this also guaranteed its sterility in developing an understanding of the concrete norms and duties relevant to specific historical situations. For Hegel, an essential feature of human moral action is the culture within which a subject lives: it is in the context of this culture that the subject makes moral decisions and performs duties. The categorical imperative can subject actions to its own test, but it cannot provide the concrete situations and roles which constitute the occasion for moral action. For Hegel, any description of moral action must do full justice to the ways in which the human spirit, in its relation to the divine spirit, has developed systems of concrete roles, duties and relationships. To limit the concept of duty to obedience to the categorical imperative would imply that each subject creates his moral life *ex nihilo*, submitting every situation encountered to an abstract test.

For Hegel, Kant's affirmation that the only thing which is truly good is a good will must imply that goodness is not characteristic of any situation or action but only of subjective intention. The young Hegel's critique of Christianity's concern for the individual soul as a privatizing theodicy which induced social apathy was paralleled in his mature

system by his critique of abstract morality (*Moralität*) as insufficient to ground community, since it was exclusively concerned with the inward and subjective conditions of moral choice. Hegel understood Kantian morality as largely irrelevant to an understanding of morality as it is actually practiced. Opposition to social practices on the basis of an abstract principle is more the exception than the rule, and necessarily so, since otherwise a relatively stable moral culture could not emerge:

‘In an existing ethical order in which a complete system of ethical relations has been developed and actualized, virtue in the strict sense of the word is in place and actually appears only in exceptional circumstances or when one obligation clashes with another. The clash, however, must be a genuine one, because moral reflection can manufacture clashes of all sorts to suit its purpose and give itself a consciousness of being something special and of having made sacrifices.’<sup>143</sup>

Hegel’s critique of Kant, then, denied that the ethical dignity of man could be derived purely from his nature as a rational being and affirmed that it could be justified only in the context of man’s living relationship with the infinite, experienced primordially in the sacramental liturgy. Hegel also maintained that the substantially greater part of moral life consisted in the practice of a moral tradition rather than in uniquely personal choices made on the basis of an abstract principle. Debates in contemporary moral philosophy would reinforce Hegel’s critique, insofar as Kant’s categorical imperative is no longer considered sufficient to constitute a norm without the additional consideration of consequences, a utilitarian element which Kant would have rejected. Yet Hegel’s own understanding of the relationship between abstract moral principles and concrete ‘ethical life’ contains an essential presupposition drawn from his philosophy of the *Weltgeist*. It is the consequence of Hegel’s understanding of divine immanence that the institutions of post-Revolutionary society do express, at least *in nuce*, the creative rationality of the spirit. Since this is the case, there can be no fundamental clash between these institutions and abstract moral principles. Subjectivity can give full and free assent to these institutions since they are the expression of the self-development of God. If, however, Hegel’s particular theology of history is rejected, and if the connection between God’s own life and the course of human history is understood in different ways, then there can be no such assumption of the substantial identity of the ethical content of actual historical institutions and abstract moral principles. Their relationship is contingent rather than necessary and therefore moral subjectivity may be justifiably more dedicated to creating a more ethical future or to opposing existing institutions than to re-enacting tradition. For Hegel, such conscious attempts to create a better future on the basis of abstract moral principles were always doomed to failure, since the *Weltgeist* used personal



passions and interests rather than abstractions as the material of history. But for those who do not share his concept of the relationship between God's life and the course of human history, there can be no alternative but to depend on the conscious employment of intersubjective reason to control the destructive and divisive effects of particular passions and interests.

### *c. The state and subjectivity*

Hegel's emphasis on subjectivity was the foundation of his unification of religion and secularity. The meaning of the secular world was precisely that it was the world in which man's subjectivity ruled. Secularity began when man's subjectivity asserted itself in original sin and broke down the walls of the garden of Eden. Secularity was the world of rupture with God but also the world of man's moral autonomy. To unite this world with the divine spirit was therefore possible only through the preservation of subjectivity. This preservation could be effected by the abandonment of the natural particularity which sought to impose a content alien from God on the world, and the welcoming by man of the divine substance of the indwelling spirit. The subjectivity on which secularity was based retained its freedom while ridding itself of what was atomistic and self-centred. By receiving a new and infinite foundation in the religious community, subjectivity could refashion secularity according to the divine characteristics of reason and freedom, while leaving unharmed its character as man's own realm, the sphere of human self-determination.

For Hegel, subjectivity is the essential agent of the absolute within the world, since no action, no movement, is possible without the intervention of subjective will. The central theme of his dialectic is the transformation of substance into subjectivity and the reconciliation of subjectivity with substance. Yet the subjectivity of the finite, individual will, although it is the necessary executor of the will of the *Weltgeist*, does not, for Hegel, make any crucial contribution of content to the universal will. Its task is rather to empty itself of all that is irreducibly particular and private and to give internal assent and fulfilment to what is universal. Just as the individual achieves the good in a religious sense only when he subjectively assents to the abandonment of his particularity in favour of sharing the life of the divine, so his historical existence has as its goal the living of the universal life of the state. Subjective, individual purposes do not act to modify the universal, to put it at risk, but only to explicate and enrich it in the world of concrete reality. Subjectivity may not will itself, but only the universal truth:

‘the more peculiarly one’s own an opinion may be, the worse its content is, because the bad is that which is wholly private and personal in its content; the rational, on the other hand, is the absolutely universal.’<sup>144</sup>

Because the will of the *Weltgeist* can only be fulfilled in concrete reality through the actions of individual subjects, this subjectivity is a crucial aspect of human individuality. Yet subjectivity does not transform the content of world history – its role is to enact it and to accept its rationality:

‘Since the laws and institutions of the ethical order make up the concept of freedom, they are the substance or universal essence of individuals, who are thus related to them as accidents only. Whether the individual exists or not is all one to the objective ethical order.’<sup>145</sup>

The strengths and weaknesses of Hegel’s understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and the rational state are revealed in his discussion of the monarchy and the estates. In the estates, the mass of the people is given an opportunity to express its own subjectivity. Hegel emphasizes that the legislative rights of the estates are not founded on a claim to special knowledge or insight, since these are more likely to be characteristic of the expert civil service. They are, on the contrary, the expression of popular subjectivity, of the people’s right to self-determination.

‘The specific function which the concept assigns to the estates is to be sought in the fact that in them the subjective moment in universal freedom – the private judgement and private will of the sphere called “civil society” in this book – comes into existence integrally related to the state. This moment is a determination of the Idea once the Idea has developed to totality, a moment arising as a result of an inner necessity not to be confused with external necessities and expediences.’<sup>146</sup>

Yet because, for Hegel, the truth of the state’s affairs is distinguishable from the will and insight of the majority of its citizens, because the universal is rational independently of popular subjectivity, the role of the estates is to fulfil the formal requirements of subjectivity rather than to determine the foundations of the state’s activity. Since the state is the expression of a unified will, an institutional form of realized subjectivity, its highest executive power must be as concentrated as possible: human subjectivity is primordially expressed in the state in the undivided executive power of the monarch. Hegel’s identification of substance and subjectivity finally identifies the monarch with the *Weltgeist*: the concept of the state as a spiritual individual, as the expression of a divine rational will, results in the denial of decisive executive power to the popular will and its restriction to the monarch. The authority of

the state ultimately expresses the oneness of the divine spirit of history and thus concentrates its sovereignty in an individual. Subjective freedom is given full scope only in the monarch, 'the subjectivity of abstract, final decision, become present in a person'.<sup>147</sup> The identification of the rational will with subjectivity, the disappearance of the distinction between subject and substance, has for Hegel the consequence that there can only be one decisive will in the state, and this will is necessarily undetermined, independent of popular consent.

It is the monarch alone, without reference to the estates, who determines the international relations of the state,<sup>148</sup> and it is the monarch's 'unrestricted caprice' which appoints and dismisses the members of the supreme council.<sup>149</sup> For Hegel, the personal characteristics of the monarch are unimportant, since

'In a completely organized state, it is only a question of the culminating point of formal decision . . . he has only to say "yes" and dot the "i" . . . In a well-organized monarchy, the objective aspect belongs to law alone, and the monarch's part is merely to set to the law the subjective "I will"'.<sup>150</sup>

Yet this description of the monarch's merely formal role is not compatible with the crucial and unrestricted powers that Hegel grants it. Within the executive sphere, the monarch is not simply confirming the outcome of the universal process of decision-making, but rather determining affairs of state by his own personal will. In particular, Hegel rejects the notion that the legislature is intended to check the powers of the executive:

'The idea of the so-called "independence of powers" contains the fundamental error of supposing that the powers, though independent, are to check one another. This independence, however, destroys the unity of the state, and unity is the chief of all desiderata.'<sup>151</sup>

Hegel's identification of God's life with the unfolding process of world-history implies that the state is a species of theophany, a concrete, institutional form of God's will, a spiritual substance which involves the individual's allegiance as powerfully as the religious relationship to God as spirit in the *Gemeinde*. In his attempt to demonstrate that the state is more than a contractual expediency, and that the life of an ethical community is essential for the self-realization of the individual, Hegel gives the state divine qualities by indentifying it with the will and purpose of the *Weltgeist*:

'This substantial unity is an absolute and unmoved end in itself: freedom achieves its highest rights in it, just as it has the highest right over against the individual, whose highest duty it is to be a member of the state.'<sup>152</sup>

The understanding of a unified divine will as the determinant of history is the basis of Hegel's critique of Rousseau's notion of the general will. It was Rousseau's achievement, for Hegel, to adduce 'the will as the principle of the state . . . a principle which has thought both for its form and its content'. Yet Rousseau's interpretation of the 'general will' depended not on the unity of the divine subject, 'the absolutely rational element in the will', but rather on a collectivity of individual wills. It was therefore subject to 'the capriciously given express consent' of individuals and must necessarily undermine 'the absolutely divine principle of the state, together with its majesty and absolute authority'. Because Rousseau and the French Revolutionaries were dealing in 'abstractions' rather than 'the Idea' their experiment ended 'in the maximum of frightfulness and terror'.<sup>153</sup> Without the presence of divine Idea, which is distinct from the general will of the citizens, a rational state cannot be constructed.

For M. Theunissen, in his *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politischer Traktat*<sup>154</sup> Hegel portrays the history of human freedom as the history of the subjective realization of the objective reconciliation of God and man in the incarnation. For Theunissen, Hegel's philosophy of religion is fundamentally a 'philosophy of the resurrection' since it is based on the conviction that the *eschaton* has already occurred in human history and is constantly influencing its development. The thrust of Hegel's philosophy is, for Theunissen, a creative union of religion and politics, a progressive human liberation under the spiritual influence of the Kingdom of God. Yet it is the particular way in which Hegel conceived this *eschaton* which had politically reactionary consequences:

'this happens, wherever Hegel projects the givenness of divine reconciliation directly onto the plane of the political events of his time. At first he covers over the gap which separates the present status of the subjective process of reconciliation from the future realization of the Kingdom of God . . . But the levelling of this difference points to the elimination of the qualitative difference between divine example and human response, between absolute-objective and merely subjective-objective reconciliation.'<sup>155</sup>

The clearest consequences of this identification of the *eschaton* with present reality are in Hegel's doctrine of the state and in particular of the monarch. Both the *eschaton* and the state are for Hegel a 'truly absolute and ultimate goal' (*wahrhaft absoluter Endzweck*). For Theunissen, the monarch portrayed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* plays a falsely 'Christological' role, mediating this secular *eschaton* to the world. Hegel grants the monarch the power of arbitrary decision, a power that exceeds even that accorded to God in Hegel's system:

‘Thus Hegel allows the King what his God may not do, since for him the Christian God has no will which escapes thought and which is in itself anything distinct from thought.’<sup>156</sup>

Hegel’s understanding of the spirit in history can be described as a ‘realized eschatology’, to use C.H. Dodd’s terms.<sup>157</sup> To understand the state as a concrete expression of the divine will, as a secular form of the *eschaton*, is to distinguish it from the intersubjective rationality of a human community, which may live in the light of the spirit but cannot be identified with it. The Christian notion of the *parousia* becomes insignificant in Hegel’s system because of this emphasis on ‘realized eschatology’. The consequences of this, in turn, are that the notion of the Kingdom of God ceases to be a critical norm for secular history and an inspiration to self-transcendence. Hegel’s understanding of the relationships of the ‘holy’ and the ‘ethical’, of divine power and human order, not only deprived the holy of its uniqueness but also elevated the human institution of the state to a quasi-holy status.

## CHAPTER 2

BAUER: ATHEISTIC HUMANISM AND THE CRITIQUE  
OF RELIGIOUS ALIENATION

## 1. THE FOUNDATIONS OF ATHEISM

a. *The Critical Dissolution of the Gospels*

Among the Young Hegelians it was Bruno Bauer, theologian turned passionate atheist, who struggled most desperately to interpret Hegel's absolute idealism as the vindication of the sovereign rights of the human self-consciousness. Bauer's radically intellectualist search for genuine humanity in the spontaneous activity of the free mind, liberated from history and the absolute, failed to discover a sustaining field of activity in the social group or any other collective, and ended as an abandonment of European intellectual history, but he succeeded in demonstrating the critical potential of his own conception of the self-consciousness.

Bauer had begun his career as a colleague of the 'Old' Hegelians, and was responsible for the edition of Hegel's *Religionsphilosophie* supervised by the theologian Marheineke. He had attended Hegel's lectures in the few years before the master's death, preferring his insistence on reason to Schleiermacher's theology of feeling. Bauer had derived from Hegel the conviction that finite and infinite be united by the efforts of the speculative reason, that a critical principle could discover the work of the absolute mind in the ongoing development of revelation. He had founded a journal to put these interpretive principles into practice, and, at an early age, had already earned the respect of the senior theologians of the Hegelian school.<sup>1</sup> Bauer's conviction of the unity of real and ideal determined his negative reaction to Strauss's *Leben Jesu* (*Life of Jesus*), but Strauss's work was to become the immediate cause of Bauer's own increasingly critical attitude to the Bible. Bauer was critical of Strauss not only because Strass had denied that the absolute had revealed itself in historical reality but because Strass transferred the Biblical emphasis on the personality of Jesus to the primitive Christian community. For Bauer, Strass had put the claims of 'substance' over those of self-consciousness by rejecting the revelation of the absolute in the person of Jesus and understanding the Gospels as the product of the mythological consciousness of a group.

Yet Strauss's approach had clearly disturbed Bauer's confidence in the fullness of the relationship between the truth of the absolute and the biblical history, and his own biblical research became increasingly critical. The culminating product of his doubts was his *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* (1841–2) (*Critique of the Synoptic Gospel Story*), written in Bonn during his tenure of the post of *Privatdozent* at the University.

Bauer's intention in subjecting the Gospel stories to a radical critique was to demonstrate that their informing principle was a creative self-consciousness, in the first place the heroic consciousness of Jesus, and after him the conscious literary activity of the evangelists. Strauss's work had at least made possible the defeat of traditional orthodoxy, bringing the new principle of free criticism to its birth, but his concept of the primitive Christian community as the unconscious creator of the Gospel myths had denied the rights of self-consciousness in an even more abstract and thorough way than fundamentalist orthodoxy had done. For Strauss, the efforts of self-consciousness are nothing 'more than substance which has processed out of its logical simplicity and taken up a definite form of existence as the power of the religious community'.<sup>2</sup> For Bauer, to speak of the traditions of the primitive Christian community or of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was equally repressive of self-consciousness. Bauer's attempt to transcend both Strauss and orthodoxy was made in the hope of revealing the role of self-consciousness as the fundamental motive-factor of human history, the true source of freedom, opposed to every principle of stability, all forms of collective life, and even the concept of substance itself:

'criticism needs to turn on itself and on the mysterious substantiality in which it has formerly enclosed itself and the object of its attention; it needs to dissolve it and lead it to the same goal as the development of substance itself leads to: to the universality and definiteness of the idea and to its true form of existence – the infinite self-consciousness . . . in which everything finds its origin and its explanation.'<sup>3</sup>

Such a concern with the philosophy of self-consciousness was not, for Bauer, a presupposition external to the Gospel stories themselves, since it could provide us with a key to understanding their mode of creation, to eliminating the last elements of positivity and to discovering the genius of the Gospel writers themselves. The role of radical Gospel criticism was to discover how the human mind itself had overstepped the bounds of tradition and had introduced a radically new principle into history. The struggle of criticism with positivity will be won only when the Bible is recognized as 'the determination, product and revelation of self-consciousness'.<sup>4</sup> This type of criticism is the 'last deed' of

Hegelian philosophy, finally freeing it of the last elements of positivity, and bringing the scope of self-consciousness to universality. The young Hegel's attempt to abstract an ethical life from Christianity, denying the value of its 'positive' miraculous features, received a strange echo in Bauer's reaction to Hegel's philosophy itself, as well as being confirmed by Bauer's similar attempts to re-work the Gospels. With the weapon of criticism a new understanding of human history can be achieved, revealing the spontaneous work of the independent self-consciousness and freeing contemporary man from the claims of any self-justifying order, the institutional forms of substance:

'Let us only plough through the ground of history with criticism; the fresh scent of life will rise up from the furrows and the old ground, which has lain fallow for long enough, will find a new productive power. Once criticism had made us pure in heart, free and ethical, then the new world cannot be far away. What more could we wish for? Do we not then need only the development of the liberated self-consciousness?'<sup>5</sup>

The self-consciousness, then, is the motive-power of history, but its content is not derived only from its own subjectivity. The new forms that self-consciousness is capable of taking are precluded by periods of struggle, in which the external world suffers an agonizing loss of meaning, coming to a point of crisis which is relieved by the creative work of self-consciousness pointing out a new path of liberation. Only self-conscious literary artists could have brought the Gospels to their finished form – Strauss's *Gemeinde* would never have been capable of putting pen to paper – but their activity is subject to the influence of the society around them. Their openness to the universal problems of the age, their attempt to express the crisis of the contemporary world, is reflected in the enormous influence their works have had. Although himself without sin, Jesus felt its power in the world sufficiently to undergo baptism, since the greatness of self-consciousness is marked by its receptivity to the spiritual travail of the world. In Bauer's re-interpretation, Jesus' baptism was the absolute victory of consciousness over the enslavements of previous world history and the certainty of this victory was the basis of Jesus' certainty of his role as Messiah. The character of self-consciousness, for Jesus, was an individuality which carried the form of the universal within itself, becoming no longer an isolated ego but a universal man in a conscious and motivated incarnation.

From his assumptions concerning the character of self-consciousness, it was clear to Bauer that no pre-existing Jewish ideas of the Messiah could be adduced to put the character of Jesus in context. A new principle, capable of beginning a new historical epoch, does not foretell itself, but comes fully formed in the consciousness of



the man who introduces it. Its birth is encouraged by the developing crisis of the age that its mission is to resolve, but its radical effectiveness lies in its novelty: 'these men are heroes only because they solve a riddle, which has occupied the world in the most varied ways up to their time, in a way which no one else had hit upon'.<sup>6</sup> The age of Jesus was in dire need of a person whose self-consciousness could overcome the opposition between God and the world. It was Jesus who developed his own consciousness of the union of God and the world to perfection in the eyes of other men, bringing the religious spirit to a new culmination. Jesus did not concentrate upon his own person, but existed only to bear witness to the possibility of this union. The adoration of Jesus himself after the resurrection was the distorted product of the religious consciousness, sacrificing the inner-worldly achievements of self-consciousness to the beyond. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was the symbolic conflict of self-consciousness with the false attractions of substance. Bauer's understanding of Jesus as the expression in consciousness of the struggles of the world-soul underlies his dramatic vision of this conflict:

'in its abandonment the spirit sees itself cut off from the power, the pleasures and the glory of the world . . . and now the awful question is, whether the spirit should forcefully make substance a part of itself, as an immediate abolition of its loss, whether it should put itself at rest by taking unto itself the world in all its glory, or whether it should remain satisfied with the inner possession of its infinite principle and depend on its quiet and gradually effective strength.'<sup>7</sup>

Jesus's mission did not introduce a principle completely foreign to nature into the world, but rather heightened the ever-present potential of the self-consciousness to a point where it seemed independent of nature — this was the source of the miracle stories. The new affirmation of the individual and his power to determine a new world implied a corresponding weakening of the claims of the family, of history and of nature itself.

Up till this point Bauer had accepted the historicity of Jesus, although denying his divinity, but the final outcome of his critical research into the Gospel stories was to deny them any historical content. His former research had led to the conclusion that the Gospel of John was a much later work than the Synoptic Gospels, which were themselves all based on an early form of the Gospel of Mark, the so-called *Urmarkus*.<sup>8</sup> But at the beginning of the third volume of his *Kritik* he radicalizes the spontaneity of the self-consciousness still further by denying Jesus any existence outside its own creations:

'the Messiah is only an ideal product of the religious consciousness, he did not exist as an actual individual, perceptible to the senses. Everything that is valid for the religious consciousness is only its own act and creation.'<sup>9</sup>

The idea of Jesus symbolized the humanization of religion, the reversal of the Jewish religious consciousness that had located the absolute in the heavenly One. Yet the expression of the religious ideal in the image of man, although attempting to abolish the tension between God and the world, resulted in a more radical subordination of humanity to the religious consciousness: religion was more alienating because in the incarnation it has claimed more of the content of human life. Since the idea of the son of man

'is once more a religious idea, it necessarily alienates the species from its own product, into which it had projected all its essential forces, and makes even the human appearance, in which man's religious consciousness sees man himself, into a transcendent object.'<sup>10</sup>

Jesus's agony in the garden showed that the religious consciousness had not created in him a genuine hero of a new principle, whose complete victory over the spiritual past would have given him calm determination in the face of a recalcitrant society.<sup>11</sup>

Bauer was now convinced that the ideal of the Messiah was the distorted religious expression of an experience that the universal consciousness had suffered in the time of Jesus. Religion had made the inner content of human experience into an alien personality, since the religious consciousness itself is 'spirit alienated from itself'.<sup>12</sup> The strangeness of Jesus was his dissolution of all ethical laws without the attempt to reproduce them at a higher level. The mystery of Christianity, the secret of its enormous alienating power, lay in the conditions of its birth: to resolve this mystery it was necessary to show that it was Christianity's abstraction from humane ethical life that had allowed it to exist and which was causing such great damage in the modern world. Ancient religions were inspired by the spirits of nature, the family and the nation. Rome's rise to universal power and the development of philosophy were the expression of an attempt by the human self-consciousness to overcome the limitations of the local and natural spirit. But the external rule of Rome was incapable of promoting any advance in humanity, and in a world where religion was still dominant any philosophical revolution had to be expressed in religious terms, not in the true categories of pure theory and free self-consciousness. Therefore the radical overcoming of the parochial limits of ancient life had to take place within the sphere of religious alienation itself, making its range and scope total, drawing all of humanity into the vortex of the flight from the world.

In the local ancient religions particular interests had hidden the horror and extent of alienation:

'the contemplation of nature casts its spell, family bonds have a sweet charm, the interests of the people give the religious spirit a lively tension with the powers that it worships: the chains which the human spirit wore in the service of these religions were wound around with flowers. Like an animal for sacrifice, gloriously and festively decorated, man delivered himself up to his gods. His own chains deceived him concerning the harshness of his service.'<sup>13</sup>

With the withering of the flowers of natural religion, the smashing of the chains of allegiance to the local gods by Roman power, the 'vampire of spiritual abstraction' completed the ruin of the old world, sucking the blood of the last forms of life that gave man identification with the concrete and natural world, with the ethical communities of family and nation. Spiritual abstraction freed the Ego from all its happy and comforting bonds and left it as the only power in a desolate world. Rather than attempt the enormous task of re-creating a new world of natural bonds and ethical life the Ego sought to confirm its own absorption of all life:

'The Ego was now everything, and yet it was empty; it had become the universal power and yet, in the ruins of the world, it took fright before itself and despaired over the loss; the empty, all-devouring Ego was filled with dread at itself; it did not dare to proclaim itself the All and thus it set itself up over against itself as a universal power, working for its own preservation and happiness in fear and trembling at the service of this power. It saw the guarantee for its preservation in the Messiah, which represented for it nothing more than what it itself was: the Messiah presented the Ego to itself as universal power, as a power in which all contemplation of nature, all the ethical characteristics of family and national spirit and of civic life, and all the forms of art, were destroyed.'<sup>14</sup>

The basis for the Christian denial of these forms of life was in Judaism, which had suppressed all natural spontaneity in ethical life and in culture. Yet even Judaism had preserved a strong consciousness of nationality, while Christianity destroyed all traditional humane structures, leaving the Ego alone in an empty universality. The oppressive *Imperium* had imposed a political universalism that was mirrored in the universality of consciousness, but this consciousness could only take an alienated form, since all possibility of humane life had been extinguished. Universality could have been positive only in the form of philosophy, by liberating self-consciousness from all positivity and bringing it to awareness of its unity over and above all civilizations. A universalizing religion had inevitably to destroy the conditions that made religion bearable, the cultural context that related it to concrete need. The tragic ambivalence of Christianity lay in its complete removal of self-consciousness from the human world in the same moment as it liberated it from parochial restrictions.

For Bauer, this explained the enormous hold that Christianity had on men. Its enormous superiority over the spiritual life of the ancient world consisted in its elevation of the universal self-consciousness to the highest principle, albeit in an intensely alienated form:

‘hence the magic which attracted humanity, bound it and forced it, since it had not yet found itself, to use up all its strength in preserving this image of itself – yes, and putting this image before all else, calling anything else, in the words of the Apostle, dirt by comparison.’<sup>15</sup>

Christianity deprived man of all self-possession, taught him to despise his own works, but at the same time, within the distorted world of the heavenly beyond, made him aware of the possibility of universal freedom. Although enslaving man far more than the ancient religions, it contained the seeds of a priceless transcendence of all limits on human universality. The incarnation represented the invasion by the false religious consciousness of the most private human domain, man’s physical existence, but at the same time made a future totality of liberation possible. The conclusion of Bauer’s critique of the Gospels, then, was that the phenomenon of Christianity owed its birth to a peculiar cultural crisis, and that, as the distorted spiritual product of this crisis, it would continue to enslave man and denigrate all his works until the precious element of truth in it had been set free. Jesus himself had never existed: if he had, he would have attempted to abolish the uncompromising Jewish division of God and man by demonstrating the possibility of their union in his own self-consciousness. The Jesus of the Gospels could evoke only fear and horror – having challenged Judaism, he proceeded to set up an even more massive barrier of religious alienation, emptying all ethical life of its content.

In his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer commented that Bauer had grasped the problems involved in discovering the kernel of historical fact in the Gospels so intensely that he had arrived at an eccentric solution, denying not only the divinity of Christ but also the historical existence of the man Jesus. Yet Bauer’s profound sensitivity to the spiritual atmosphere of the Hellenistic world, his awareness of the revolutionary character of Christianity as the culmination of the two greatest developments in ancient civilization, the growth of Roman power and the combined influence of Greek philosophy and the mystery religions, made possible his insight into the relationships between the character of a historical epoch and the spiritual solutions that it found for itself. The cultural crisis and physical suffering of the Graeco-Roman world subjected to the depredations of the *Imperium* constituted the geo-spiritual matrix of the incarnation, the ground of suffering in which the salvation religion of Jesus could grow.

'No one else had as yet grasped with the same completeness the idea that primitive Christianity and early Christianity were not merely a teaching put into practice, but more, much more, since to the experience of which Jesus was the subject there allied itself the experience of the world-soul at a time when its body – humanity under the Roman Empire – lay in the throes of death. Since Paul, no one had apprehended so powerfully the mystic idea of the supersensible *soma christou*. Bauer transferred it to the historical plane and found the "body of Christ" in the Roman Empire.'<sup>16</sup>

### b. *The Transformation of Hegel's Absolute Idealism*

Hand in hand with Bauer's attempt to deny Christianity any historical basis, as the crucial step in abolishing the possibility of religion, went his efforts to show that the implications of Hegelianism itself were radically atheistic. Unlike Feuerbach, who was convinced that only a fundamental critique of Hegel could make a philosophy of the new, self-possessing man possible, Bauer identified himself with Hegel's thought by a radical exploitation of its ambiguities. For Bauer, the dynamically negative force of Hegel's historical dialectic was the key instrument in the creation of the conditions for a totally new self-understanding of man, the means of abolishing the ossified relics of the spiritual past. In his *Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen* (1841) (*Trump of the last judgement against Hegel the atheist and antichristian*) Bauer set himself the task of discrediting the claim of the Old Hegelians to represent the legitimate heritage of Hegel by demonstrating that Hegel himself had pre-figured all the most radical teachings of the Young Hegelian party. Hiding behind the mask of a fanatically orthodox critic of Hegel, Bauer attempted to show how his basic doctrines could be transformed into the foundations of a new radicalism.

Bauer saw the beginning of modern philosophy in Spinoza, who had dissolved all being into a unified substance: this dissolution was the negation of all established forms, the challenge to all accepted truth, and laid the foundations for philosophy by freeing the spirit from the claims of the historically given. Bauer quoted Hegel's *History of Philosophy*: 'Every philosophy must achieve this negation of all particularity: it is the liberation of the spirit and its absolute foundation'.<sup>17</sup> Substance, in Bauer's interpretation of Hegel, expressed itself in infinite and finite subjectivity. The Old Hegelians had claimed that Hegel's infinite subject could be identified as the primal form of substance, that the two were in fact unified, and that this unity corresponded to the religious category of the divine. The orthodox criticism of this was that it simply duplicated Spinoza's pantheism, but Bauer saw an opposite tendency in Hegel. Hegel had taught that the

fulfilment of the development of the infinite subject was its self-knowledge through the finite subject: from this Bauer concluded that in Hegel's thought substance itself necessarily became subjectivity and that this subjectivity reached its conclusion only in its finite form. The end-point of the dialectic of substance and subject was the finite human self-consciousness. The content of substance could become active only in the form of subjectivity and to exhaust itself it must produce not one primal subject, the creator of heaven and earth, but the whole universe of being. Since substance had passed into subjectivity, and since the subjectivity could know itself only in the self-consciousness of man, the culmination of the whole process, then this human self-consciousness became the most powerful factor, reducing the categories both of substance and of the infinite subject, God, to figments of its own imagination. In consequence, the religious relationship of man to God became a relationship within the human self-consciousness itself, its reflection on the forms of its own spiritual history, the successive stages of its own emergence as the decisive factor in the world of being:

'all those powers which still appear to be distinct from the self-consciousness as substance or as absolute idea, are only aspects of itself, objectified in the process of religious image-making.'<sup>18</sup>

For Bauer, Hegel's attack on Schleiermacher's theology of feeling gave the illusion that he had intended to reverse Schleiermacher's emphasis on the subjectivity of religious belief, his concentration on the special characteristics of the religious consciousness, by developing rational and systematic knowledge of the absolute. In reality, however, since Hegel had made the finite self-consciousness the conclusion of the absolute's self-knowledge, he had produced a more radical subjectivity. Schleiermacher's subject had been aware of its dependence on the infinite but Hegel's saw itself as the apex of spiritual evolution. If the absolute and its creation could be identified, then the end-point of that creation, the human self-consciousness, was the destination of the absolute, the final elimination of substance by subjectivity:

'O you betrayed and short-sighted men! Did your Master say that substance was a distinct, individual subject? Did he say that this was the primal subject, the primal individual, who created heaven and earth? Did you not notice that your soul-murdering father intended only to say that substance could be grasped only through the category of subjectivity, and this is what he carried out in his system, so that the inner process of substance is brought to the point where it opens out as self-consciousness within the finite spirit, drawing its own obscure depths up into the light of subjectivity, robbing it of its darkness, of its dread obscurity? Can substance, when it wishes to bring its infinite riches to consciousness, satisfy itself with only one subject? One is too little for it. Its infinity can foam forth only from the chalice of the whole kingdom of the spirit.'<sup>19</sup>

The transformation of God into *Weltgeist* had taken the meaning of history away from the work of divine providence and given it to the evolution of self-consciousness: progress in the consciousness of freedom had become the internal and self-sufficient criterion of history. The religious consciousness was a 'dream of the spirit', in which self-consciousness abandoned the multifarious and particular reality of the external world and retreated into itself, abstracting itself from all activity. Christianity was called the absolute religion by Hegel only because it represented the religious consciousness in its most abstract purity, cleansed of any association with ethical life, with nature, art and human society. He gave it his highest praise because it was most vulnerable to dissolution into philosophy, because Christianity had already demonstrated the philosophical truth that the end of God is man, the outcome of substance the subjective self-consciousness. The historicity of the incarnation became superfluous in Hegel's system, since his understanding of the absolute already involved man. Rather than being a work of redemption, it merely reminded man of his union with God, of the fundamental identity in the divine and human natures.

The consequence, in Bauer's interpretation, of Hegel's subordination of religion to philosophy was a vindication of the rights of the state over the Church. Since the state was the expression in human society of rationality and ethical truth, it could co-exist with religious associations that limited their role to the cultivation of subjective piety but not with a Church that attempted to attack the principles of science themselves, setting itself up as the reign of God on earth. The religious *Gemeinde* was the domain in which the spirit first revealed itself among men, but 'when it fulfils itself as an ethical world, it becomes the state or rather the state frees itself from bondage to its transcendent principle'.<sup>20</sup> For Bauer, Hegel's philosophy not only elevated scientific, critical thought above religion but gave it the whole human world as its domain. For Hegel, the role of philosophy had been to give man spiritual confidence in a turbulent world, to extract from the chaos of history a meaning that could survive the collapse of familiar institutions:

'where inner striving and external reality have broken apart, where the former shape of religion no longer satisfies, where an ethical life dissolves itself – only then does man engage in philosophy. The spirit seeks refuge in the realm of the idea and constructs for itself a kingdom of the idea over against the real world.'<sup>21</sup>

For Bauer this did not mean that philosophy's task was to construct a world of thought after historical institutions had died their own natural death, but rather that its activity should point out the gulf between the ethical foundations of existing institutions and the purity

of the self-consciousness: the 'Kingdom of the Idea' that philosophy is capable of creating acts as a critical yardstick in the judgement of the present world. Bauer could claim to have legitimately re-interpreted Hegel's thought since he did not propose that philosophy should conjure up a set of utopian institutions but simply that it exploit the crucial hiatus between the critical rationality of self-consciousness and the existing authoritarian and pietist institutions.

For Bauer, the world of the Restoration had already outlived its ethical rational validity, but only philosophy could make this clear. Rather than being the rational witness of historical decline, philosophy became the handmaid of that decline, acting in the name of reason:

'The substantial foundations of an age were considered to be valid — they had immediate authority and continued to express this authority in external statutes: thus the spirit was still unfree. But science is free: it liberates the spirit and its conceptions transform the former content into a new form and thus into a new content — the laws of freedom and of self-consciousness. Hence philosophy is a critique of the established order.'<sup>22</sup>

Once the rights of critical self-consciousness were recognized, then the conflict with existing reality followed. Hegel's emphasis made clear that the rational mind only becomes aware of the inadequacies of a set of institutions once their ethical life and religious spirit dies away: this, for Bauer, was already true of Restoration Germany, since reason had already freed itself from any identification with reality, shorn itself of all religious and communal associations, and declared itself free to find a new world by removing the veil of validity that history had falsely given to existing reality. On this interpretation of Hegel, the distinction between theory and *praxis* becomes irrelevant, since theory itself, by liberating the spirit, destroys the foundations of outworn institutions as effectively as any *praxis*. For Bauer, Hegel had justified a consciously revolutionary role for philosophy: 'His theory was in itself alone the most dangerous, the most comprehensive and most destructive *praxis*. It was the revolution itself'.<sup>23</sup> In his praise for the French Revolution, Hegel had recognized that philosophy had become a universal principle, that it was the mind itself that could direct the course of history. If, for Hegel, it was the philosophers who write 'the cabinet orders of world-history in their original form', then it was philosophy that became the criterion of true humanity and the philosopher the true man, conscious of his elevation above the unphilosophical masses.<sup>24</sup>

This interpretation of Hegel was to be the source of Bauer's rejection of all forms of humanism that attempted to deny the uniqueness of the isolated thinker or that would centre on liberation through the activity of social groups. The foundations of freedom, given Bauer's interpre-



tation of Hegel, are in the unrestricted activity of a specially gifted community of thinkers, capable of constantly re-discovering the pure freedom of self-consciousness: 'philosophers are the true revolutionaries, the only dangerous revolutionaries, because it is they who are most consistent and ruthless'.<sup>25</sup> Since the most powerful factor in history is human subjectivity, not substance, the highest expression of this subjectivity, the fully developed free self-consciousness, is a force capable of drawing history after itself, of destroying the structures of the past by the imposition of the demands of abstract reason.

## 2. THE RIGHTS OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

The *Kritik der Synoptiker* and the *Posaune* jointly completed the task of eliminating all religious transcendence from the heritage of idealism. The *Kritik* radicalized the work of Strauss and attempted to destroy Christianity's historical basis at about the same time as Feuerbach's attempt to show that Christianity had no real transcendent content. By writing the *Kritik* and the *Posaune* Bauer attempted to prove that the only legitimate remnant of the Christian philosophical tradition was the human self-consciousness itself, and that, having achieved this self-clarification, it could go on to re-work the external world according to its own priorities. In the *Posaune*, Bauer had spoken of the need to make theory a form of ruthless practical activity, inviting head-on collision with the forces of the past. In the review of the *Posaune* published in the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*,<sup>26</sup> the suggestions made in the inverted style of the *Posaune*'s pietist mask were clarified and their political consequences made clear. The Hegelian philosophy had been the first to recognize itself as the 'idea of the age'. It must not restrict itself to this role, but rather, fortified by its consciousness of itself as the self-awareness of the age, become action:

'This philosophy needs to subject itself to the dialectic which it presents in terms of the notion. This process, this movement to self-objectification and actuality, is its history.'<sup>27</sup>

The scornful criticism of Schelling, that Hegel's philosophy could never escape the realm of pure thought, will be answered by this development on the part of Hegel's disciples.

As the culmination of philosophy Hegelianism is both the last philosophy and the first theory of revolution, since it is the first to bring the work of the idea to bear on concrete reality.

'We have set out on the path to external existence. The whole of existence must now receive the form which is appropriate to the self-conceiving idea; a form in which the idea can recognize itself as its own object.'<sup>28</sup>

The crucial changes fermenting in the present situation are highlighted by the anxiety of those to whom the thankless task of defending the dead forms of the past has fallen, which must inevitably collapse 'before the breath of the new spirit'. For Bauer, the only difference between Hegel and himself, in this programme, is the explicit attack on existing social institutions.

Bauer's interpretation of Hegel, and his attribution of Christianity's alienating power to the dreadful impact of political tyranny in Roman times, imply a developed concept of political freedom and the resolution to act for its achievement. Yet this is perhaps the most unclear aspect of Bauer's career, a question that is only resolved, in a clearly negative sense with regard to politics, once his influence had begun to wane. The puzzle in Bauer's career is his attitude to politics: whether his political ideas ever consisted of anything more than the demand for a state that could protect intellectual freedom. What was the meaning in political terms of the *praxis* that Bauer proclaimed was the clear consequence of Hegel's thought? The radicalism that rejected Strauss's *Leben Jesu* as still involved with 'substance', that spoke of the 'terrorism of reason', had political consequences which, while radically opposing the Prussian regime, never posed any threat to it.

Bauer's theory of the state was developed by a radicalization of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*. In *Der christliche Staat und unsere Zeit* (*The Christian State and Our Time*) Bauer contrasted the state as the embodiment of secular reason with a state that conceded its own role to the Church, a development that threatened in the reign of the new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. For Bauer, even the crudest form of the state betrays its own nature as the 'manifestation of freedom and the act of universal self-consciousness',<sup>29</sup> but the historical role of religion has been to deprive men of the awareness of the spiritual unity that the state can give. To enter into competition with the state the Church must transcend the realm of feeling and inwardness and develop will and self-consciousness. It was Christianity that was first able to do this effectively, through the elaboration of a Church structure as the expression of will and of doctrine as a work of consciousness. Claiming a unique relationship to the infinite, Christianity deprived all spheres of human activity of their natural independence. Rejecting the intrinsic value of ethical relationships, religion granted them importance only as injunctions within the arbitrary context of religious obedience. The worship of the beyond could not tolerate an independent ethical world that derived its priorities from human experience:

'That cultivation of the ethical spirit which raises itself to infinity within the family, the state and history, by its service of these powers — the force of religion cannot even recognize this inner labour of the spirit.'<sup>30</sup>

This rejection of the ethical independence of the secular world, the restriction of the state to the godless external world, was confirmed by the Reformers, who regarded the state as nothing more than an institution of force, necessary to suppress worldly evil. Protestant belief had rescued the spirit from Catholic dogmatism but was not capable of developing its content to allow it to permeate the state and become the source of ethical life: 'its development into dogma led far above worldly matters and the interests of the present to the heavenly world'.<sup>31</sup> The Christian state of the modern Protestant monarchy is Christian because it accepts that the Church is the sole source of spiritual life, affirming its own spiritlessness and restricting its own self-affirmation to the mechanical use of power. The state becomes Christian 'when it admits its own spiritlessness *vis à vis* the Church and subordinates itself to divine revelation, which is uniquely the Church's possession'.<sup>32</sup>

It was, for Bauer, the Enlightenment that diverted self-consciousness away from its alienation in belief towards a recognition of its own sovereign rights within the real world, its infinite scope as the spiritual foundation of all human activity. The truth could now be identified with self-consciousness rather than cut off from it in the world of the beyond. This secularity permeated the state to give it a new spirituality, realizing its true nature as an 'earthly divine'. when the state takes over the spiritual content of the Church, having transformed this content into an ethical rather than a religious force, it ceases to be merely the sphere of power and becomes spiritual in its own right. As such it also ceases to be 'Christian', rejecting the Church's claim to possess the true infinity of self-consciousness. The abstract, alienated infinity which the Church had cultivated becomes the 'objective existence of the universality of the liberated self-consciousness'.<sup>33</sup> The fundamental task of the state, then, is to protect the enlightened and rational self-consciousness that is its foundation, to prevent the lapse of humane ethical life back into the religious consciousness. The clearest symptom of the health of self-consciousness is the freedom of critical science, and the test of the state's secular vigour is its ability to protect science from the intervention of the Church. The union of the two Protestant Churches (Evangelical and Reformed) by decree of the Prussian monarchy had shown that secular universality could triumph over theological differences, but the rising tide of Christian romanticism, given support by the new king, posed a grave threat to the achievements of the past.

In *Der christliche Staat*, then, Bauer adapted the basic concepts of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* to his own atheistic standpoint. For Hegel, as

for Bauer, the state was the concrete and objective expression of the infinite life of consciousness, an articulated and institutional form of rationality that depended on the freedom of thought won by the Enlightenment. For Hegel, however, the state derived its life both from the philosophical contemplation of the Idea and from the worship of the absolute spirit in the context of the religious *Gemeinde*. Secularization had shown philosophical, freely critical awareness to be the form of mental life most appropriate to the rational structure of the Idea, but it could never deny the historical achievements of religion in laying the foundations of human subjectivity by uniting man with God in worship. Philosophy and religion played complementary roles in bringing all citizens, in their differentiated functions, to awareness of the well-spring of the state in the historically self-revealing spirit. The Church, as the institutional expression of religion, could never claim influence over the state, since the subjectivity and emotion characteristic of religion could never effectively grasp the differentiated rationality of the state, nor could the enlightened state ever fully identify itself with one particular form of religious subjectivity against another, even if it were the absolute religion in its most developed form, Protestant Christianity.

In contrast to Hegel, Bauer saw Church and state as competitors for a unified spiritual content. Because the religious consciousness implied the alienation of the self-consciousness, the denial of the truly human, the Church's strength necessarily involved the state's weakness. The attempt of the Church to suppress critical freedom, in particular the Biblical criticism that Bauer himself had practised to the point of denial of the historicity of the Gospels, must be resisted by the rational state at all costs. This was the appeal to the Prussian state that Bauer made in his *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit* (*The Good Cause of Freedom and my Own Affair*) (1842). The state and the Church are founded, for Bauer, on two contradictory views of man: the Church constantly reminds man of his fallen nature, his need to abandon self-determination and beg for divine help, while the state depends on a developed concept of human self-sufficiency. The Church, as a powerful and normative institution, was only necessary to man when the state was still in its immaturity – 'the Church is only the manifestation of the imperfections of the immature state'.<sup>34</sup> The age old competition between Church and state can only be resolved by a clear realization that they compete for common ground, for the institutional expression of human self-consciousness, and that secularization must mean the withering away of the Church as a universal structure. With the maturity of the state any useful role that the Church played in the past ends, just as the awakening of reason renders the Christian form of human universality obsolete.

The Church's resistance to the free activity of science demonstrates that it depended on a self-consciousness divided against itself, imposing the privacy of the religious consciousness on the potential universality of the human mind. A state dominated by this false consciousness can only be an institution protecting private rights, incapable of resolving the division between state and civil society. Only a state that grounds itself in a universal, self-determining secularity can unite its citizens in a sphere that transcends private economic interest. The privacy of religious feeling, drawing man away from his neighbour towards the heavenly beyond, imposes privacy on political relationships also, making the state a mechanical guarantor of private rights:

'the businessman, working in his office, without reflection or awareness that his work serves a greater whole, who is petrified in the mechanism of his narrow occupation and who has no express and living relationship to the universality of the state: such a man expresses this lack of relationship with the essence of the state, his alienation from its universality, in belief in a divine being and a heavenly beyond, which is alien to him and to the world in which he lives and which bears no relationship to it.'<sup>35</sup>

This is most clearly revealed when the Church claims the right to mediate between the state and its citizens through the sacraments: the Christian state imposes baptism and confirmation as conditions of full membership, denigrating the simple ethical relationship of man to man. The mediation of the relationship between man and the state through the alien religious absolute reveals the true nature of power in such a state: rulers depending on religion for legitimation are cut off from the ruled as an alien and threatening mass, always fearful of the possibility that their subjects will actively demand an authentic state. Religion expresses the dependence and lack of political rights of the subject of the Christian state, it is the 'expression, concrete manifestation and sanction of the imperfection and sickness of established relationships'.<sup>36</sup>

The understanding of religion as the expression of political subjection, the spiritual reflection of an alienated human situation, suggests that the focus of Bauer's attack is on the authoritarian nature of the state, and that his demand for freedom centres on the need to set up a liberal state. Yet the impulse behind *Die gute Sache der Freiheit* is a call for intellectual freedom against religious orthodoxy: the rights Bauer demands of the state are the rights of critical science, the 'principle of freedom and of the free development of the truth', without which the secular state cannot exist. A state satisfying his demands must restrict the influence of the Church to the strictly private sphere and guarantee the rights of secular culture, becoming a true expression of universal self-consciousness. Bauer's ideal retains Hegel's concept

of the state as the objective expression of the free mind while suggesting that a realized unity of private and public life, civil and political society, is possible. In *Die gute Sache der Freiheit* the relationship between his demand for intellectual freedom and his concept of the state is not yet made explicit: it is unclear whether religion is understood as the source of political ills or as their expression. Bauer's understanding of and concern for political freedom is still ambiguous in *Die gute Sache der Freiheit*, but the work reveals clearly that the fundamental experience affecting Bauer's attitude to freedom was the state's refusal to protect his own academic freedom to the furthest extreme, where a lecturer in theology determined to destroy all evidence for the historicity of the Gospels and to dissolve the foundations of religion from within.

Bauer's concern for intellectual freedom as the fundamental guarantee of a future humanism was always more intense than his dedication to the cause of liberalism and democracy as forms of political freedom. While *Der christliche Staat* und *Die gute Sache der Freiheit* do not make political demands beyond an enlightened secular state, some of Bauer's essays in the *Rheinische Zeitung* are full of praise for the republican principles of France and the United States.<sup>37</sup> Yet even here Bauer imposed his own conception of an essentially anti-religious struggle for freedom on a journal concerned with political liberalism, much to the annoyance of Marx, its editor.<sup>38</sup> Even at the high point of his political concern, Bauer's critique of the regime was directed most intensely at its sacral character rather than its political authoritarianism.

Bauer's subordination of political freedom to man's freedom from religion becomes clear in his essays *Die Judenfrage* (*The Jewish Question*) and *Über die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden* (*On the Ability of Contemporary Jews and Christians to Become Free*). The thesis of both these pieces is that political freedom is unattainable until the dialectic of liberation from religion has been experienced. Bauer rejects the liberal thesis that the free state should be indifferent to religious belief, since, if the state is based on the work of the free self-consciousness, on the ideals of the Enlightenment, then a religious group that is unprepared to share in the work of consciousness that led from religious belief to intellectual freedom cannot share in its life. Judaism must experience the rigours of *Kritik* just as Christianity did: it cannot make itself at home in a world to which it contributed nothing and which it contradicts by its unchanged religious beliefs. Bauer's political theory depends on a unity of consciousness that can only be achieved by universal atheism. The solution to the religious discrimination of the Christian state is not to abolish its exclusions against particular religious groups but to subject its self-

definition as an anti-humanist political order to radical criticism. Because of this the Jews can expect the support of free men only if they are prepared to abandon their ancient faith and strike out along the road of spiritual emancipation that leads through Christianity to atheism. The recognition of the rights of man is not a simple task but rather the outcome of strenuous spiritual evolution, demanding from both Jew and Christian the abandonment of the particular allegiance of the religious community and the taking up of the universal human nature that Judaism in particular denied for so long.

Reacting to historical change by developing the rigid structure of the Talmud out of the fluidity of Mosaism, the Jews became a race incapable of change. Like the young Hegel, Bauer characterizes Jewish orthodoxy as a soulless mechanism: the conviction that it had reached the perfection of religious truth denied the Jewish race the opportunity of development, stifling the universality implicit in the teachings of the prophets. To realize the essence of their own faith, to accept the possibility of a wider future, the Jews had to reject the privileges of exclusiveness. A free and humane political order depended, for Bauer, on the full realization of the ethical potential of a people, which must mean the uncompromising and ruthless rejection of sterile teachings:

‘the ethical development of a people can only consist in the dedicated execution of the ideas that have emerged in its own self-consciousness; in passionate striving for the sake of these ideas, even if it should mean that it must sacrifice itself for them.’<sup>39</sup>

Instead, the Jews placed all their trust in an alien law, conceived not as a free expression of relationships but as the command of God. Achieving an existence apart from the people, the law made all natural arrangements impossible, leaving the Jews helpless in the varied situations of history. A people concentrated so exclusively on a heavenly future is incapable of taking a fruitful part in the arrangements of a state.

Without a willingness to abandon their own exclusiveness, the Jews can only duplicate the character of the Christian state, which recognizes people only in terms of their particular interests, not through their universal humanity. The Christian law imposes ‘corporation’ status on the Jews because their own faith depends on particularity. The Christian state and orthodox Judaism both accept that belief involves special privileges and they therefore relate in a consistent, although negative, way. For Bauer, the basic error of the liberals is to believe that emancipation is possible without the complete abolition of religious differences. If religion remains, then ‘the fundamental privilege remains, which must constantly lead to the re-birth of all the

others'.<sup>40</sup> Emancipation is possible for the Jews only with the abandonment of all religious distinctions between themselves and other men, re-uniting themselves with those peoples who have undergone the beneficial influence of historical development. By cutting the chimerical links with the jealous God of Israel, the Jews can once more share in the riches available to the self-determining and universal human consciousness. This goal cannot be achieved by accepting baptism, Heine's 'passport to European civilization', but by taking up the conclusions of the most developed form of the free mind, atheism itself. The solution to the problem of the Jews, then, is for the Jews themselves to take part in the struggle against the religious basis of the state, not to campaign for special exemption for themselves in a state necessarily ridden with religious privilege. Only by the complete overcoming of religion is a human state possible, deriving its legitimacy exclusively from human self-determination.

A similar conception of the relationship of political freedom and religion is worked out in Bauer's essay *Über die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden*. Since, for Bauer, Christianity represents a higher stage of spiritual evolution than Judaism, out of which the final truth of human nature, atheist self-consciousness, can come, then the way to political freedom passes necessarily through the alienated universality of Christianity. Christianity may be attacked from the standpoint of pure criticism, but not from the point of view of Judaism. The task of the Jew is to attempt to recover the development that man has undergone in Christianity by joining in the work of criticism, itself the realization of the universal humanity that Christianity contained in an alienated form.

Bauer's concept of freedom, then, depended on the realization of a new, atheistic humanism, from which in turn political freedoms follow. A democratic state is impossible without foundations in the unity of consciousness of its citizens, all sharing the self-consciousness that makes human creativity in art, science and community relationships possible as free activity. A state based simply on the acceptance of certain political characteristics, such as free elections and a parliament, rather than on a unity of consciousness, cannot overcome the distinction between public and private life and allows the division of ruled and ruler to constantly recur. Bauer's *Judenfrage* is still concerned with the creation of a free political order, but sees the fundamental obstacle to this in the religious question. His argument for political freedom seeks no historical agent in the form of a particular class, either bourgeoisie or proletariat: religion is an affliction affecting all classes and its abolition can come only through the efforts of classless *Kritiker*. Although Bauer's solution to the Jewish problem clearly failed



to see that Jewish belief and involvement in free political institutions are not incompatible, his predictions of the future role of the Jews in European culture were remarkably accurate. Atheists of Jewish birth became some of the most prominent contributors to the universalist humanism that Bauer held up as an ideal — this was already true of Hess and Marx.

### 3. THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Bauer had arrived at atheism by the criticism of the Christian Gospels and the derivation from Hegel's works of the concept of the human self-consciousness as the sole creative force. Yet already in the *Kritik der Synoptiker* he had attempted to develop a concept of the religious consciousness in its own right, seen as an integral part of human history, essential to the development of human nature. The refusal to abandon the cultivation of this consciousness, however, becomes for Bauer the most dreadful psychopathology, and many of his works were devoted to these inseparable characteristics of religion: its role in the evolution of humanity, and its destruction of the potential of the same humanity. The role of religion in developing a universal consciousness is held in tension with its continuing alienating effect.

Speaking of John the Baptist in the *Kritik der Synoptiker*, Bauer describes the religious consciousness as a split in the self-consciousness in which its own characteristics are set up over against itself as an alien power. The self-consciousness loses all confidence in relationship to this power but at the same time the content of the religious consciousness always remains dependent on the freedom of the self-consciousness itself, since it duplicates the content created by this freedom in an alienated form. The life and history of the self-consciousness are preyed upon by religion to constantly amplify the claims of the alien transcendent, and the spiritual victories of self-consciousness become the miraculous machinery of the heavenly world. Religious alienation deprives self-consciousness of its own works but can never guarantee the complete domination of man, since it is not itself a creative and forward-looking force, but only a temporary refuge. The self-consciousness forces religion to become involved in the real events of human self-determination:

'yet the Ego as self-consciousness cannot lose itself completely; in its subjective and worldly thinking and willing, permeated by ethical purpose, it retains its freedom and the religious consciousness and its historical development are willy-nilly drawn into this movement of freedom.'<sup>41</sup>

In the *Kritik der Synoptiker* Bauer had concluded that the historical function of Christianity was to provide a refuge for the human spirit in an age of political catastrophe. In his later works, he attempted to develop this hypothesis into a theory of the role of religion, and of Christianity in particular, in the development of humanity. The first form of universal self-consciousness, freed from any restrictions of place and custom, was Christianity itself, but the riddle of history was that this universality was first discovered in a form that escaped all identification with human existence itself: the highest potential of human nature was stolen from man at the moment of its birth. The historical grip of Christianity on the human race is explained by this universality: Christianity had been so influential in shaping the human mind that consciousness could only distinguish itself as free and independent after centuries of struggle. Because of this, Christianity is both more and less inhuman than Judaism: the Jew can still relate to the concrete human interests of family and nation – to this extent he shares in the rich natural life of the ancient pagan religions, while Christianity abstracts man from all involvement with the world as a valid field of endeavour in its own right. At the same time, by developing a universal concept of man, Christianity far transcended the world of the Jews. It is the most creative and at the same time the most inhuman of religions because it developed an understanding of humanity as free from all the restrictions of nature and history and in the same movement abstracted it from the world and transformed it into a power hostile to man's self-determination. In Protestantism the dominance of the religious consciousness is internalized and intensified to the highest degree, but at the same time it is only from this most drastic state of alienation that the final self-discovery of human nature will be possible. Protestantism brings the work of religion in creating self-consciousness, as an internally possessed and spiritually creative principle, to a climax: it is the form of religion that must be lived through for genuine freedom to become a possibility. Because of this Christians are more capable of achieving political freedom than Jews: nothing follows from Jewish self-liberation but ordinary natural behaviour, the overcoming of arbitrary legalism. The dissolution of Christianity, in contrast, will be the decisive revolution in human history, the final liberation of human spiritual potential for the authentic activities of art and science. Christianity itself was a type of *Aufklärung* of the ancient religions, an *Aufklärung* that failed because it was unable to prevent the development of a new religion that claimed all the spoils of its labour. The consequence of the *Aufklärung* of Christianity itself, however, will be definitive:

'The Christian, once he abolishes his Christianity, gives humanity all that it could possibly take as its own; he gives it itself; he returns it to itself, after it had lost itself – and, indeed, had never had self-possession.'<sup>42</sup>

Christianity's superiority over Judaism is the result of the effect that pagan philosophy had on it, and it is the liberation of these ancient pagan elements in it that will make possible the new and final *Aufklärung*.<sup>43</sup>

Christianity began with a proclamation of universal freedom and equality, just as all movements of Enlightenment had done, but because this freedom was achieved only within the sphere of the religious consciousness it could never affect the forms of slavery active in the real world. By placing itself far above the world and producing an image of man that was a theoretical denial of his real bondage, religion avoided the task of contributing to the evolution of human freedom within history. Its purely spiritual endorsement of freedom allowed the world to remain as it was, until finally religion was forced to reproduce the character of the world in all its primitive imperfection, becoming the fantastic reflection of that 'which it thought it far transcended'.<sup>44</sup> The character of Christianity as the alienated form of universal self-consciousness had the effect of denying the freedom implicit in this self-consciousness and supporting the forces hostile to it, since by opposing a false consciousness to the historical forms of slavery religion sought to magnify itself as the only refuge from them, increasing their hold over the real lives of their subjects.

The task of true *Kritik*, by contrast, is to grapple with the structures of history, discerning those that have ceased to express an aspect of human freedom and already impose a sterile and alien form of existence: only commitment to radical criticism of the real world can develop authentic freedom. The realization of freedom began only when the veil of the religious consciousness was pierced by the efforts of the French *philosophes* and the ethical activism of the French Revolution. By refusing any relationship with historical reality the universal principles implied in religion act inversely:

'In the hands of religion those principles that are in themselves truest — in this case universal equality — are constantly perverted and twisted into their opposite . . . true principles are in their religious version absolute error, since they revile and abjure all mediation.'<sup>45</sup>

Since Christianity itself arose as a symbol of the despair felt by the states of the ancient world in their own inability to express the potential of a free and universal self-consciousness, it represented throughout history the denigration of the freedom possible in state and society. Only in the eighteenth century did it become clear that a form of the state was possible in which the image of man expressed in an alienated form by Christianity could be realized.<sup>46</sup>

The historical role of Christianity, the most developed form of religion, had been to assist man to come to an awareness of himself as universal self-consciousness and at the same time to prevent this self-consciousness being applied to man's earthly situation. It was an essential part of the dialectic of history, and history itself is the only appropriate mode of understanding the world, since the self-consciousness works exclusively through constant transcendence of the structures it has already developed. In Bauer's contemporary world, however, when the free and atheistic culmination of self-consciousness is more and more active, the continuing dominance of Christianity plays no constructive role, but rather passes over into complete negativity. The role of *Kritik* in this situation is to initiate a headlong attack on religion, since the destructive clash of the principle of freedom, of the seed of the future, with the alienations of the past is the motive power of history. No freedom can be achieved without the strenuous effort of battle with the established order.

For Bauer, the personal experience of dismissal from his university post made this commitment to a drastically polemical stance all the more intense. His analysis of the phenomenon of religion as a fundamental feature of man's evolution towards freedom becomes, in the contemporary situation, a destructive criticism of religion as the most perverted form of psychopathology. Bauer's refusal to abandon his post was based on his conviction that he had revealed the inevitable self-dissolution of theology. The practice of free criticism had shown that the Gospels had no historical foundation, and the task of the critic was to remain within the theological establishment, destroying it from within. Bauer refused to leave until theology itself saw the inevitability of its own demise:

'Am I at fault, if I have carried out the freedom of research conscientiously according to the principles of the evangelical Church and have come to the conclusion that the Church is compelled by its own principle to dissolve itself . . . if the correct development of theology leads to theology's dissolution.'<sup>47</sup>

The question of Bauer's future career should therefore rather become the problem of whether the theological faculties themselves any longer had a right to exist, whether established Christianity can any longer co-exist with the truth about itself that has now been revealed.<sup>48</sup>

For Bauer, since free self-consciousness had already emancipated itself from Christianity, the alienated religious consciousness itself, unmixed with any positive elements, must begin to abstract itself more and more from humanity, intensifying its irrational features until it reached the paradigmatic stage of total perversity. The religious consciousness, in the age when it faces the emancipated self-consciousness,

only achieves its fullness when it is capable of total rejection of all human achievements for the sake of the alien divine. At this point, it becomes clear that the Christian denial of the world is made not because of a positive desire for a perfect future – rather that the disgust for this world brought to an extreme is the sole content of this future.<sup>49</sup>

‘religious self-denial is first realized when family, state, art and science, all the creations of the free spirit, all the property and ornaments of humanity, are sacrificed to the image of a heavenly world.’<sup>50</sup>

The religious consciousness will only reveal its weird heroism when it abandons all hope and knowledge of the heavenly beyond and satisfies itself with the exercise of one simple task:

‘when it exalts itself above the audacity of the self-consciousness, which wants to found its own kingdom on this earth, simply by the use of the mere idea of the heavenly beyond, and damns reason and ethics in the name of an unknown world.’<sup>50</sup>

Religious belief in the middle ages was much more worldly insofar as it attempted to introduce elements of philosophy into dogma. Now, by contrast, it is clearly recognized that religion approaches its essence only when it is completely liberated from all association with rationality. Bauer, the radical atheist, and Kierkegaard, the believer, are here fully agreed that the true character of religion is only obscured by attempts to develop a rational *praeparatio evangelii*. The abandonment of reason becomes so complete that the religious consciousness must cease to examine the arguments of the critic of religion, relying fully on its own irrational power of condemnation. To grant even the rights of conflict to the *Kritiker* is to be compromised by the use of the human faculties of reason and language: ‘in future, criticism and philosophy will be wordlessly contradicted by dancing, convulsions and rolling of the eyes.’<sup>51</sup>

The alienation of human qualities in the distorted heavenly world is only the first step in the development of religion. The subjective experience of flight from the world and projection of an alien ideal is followed by the activity of the theological consciousness proper, which elaborates a whole structure of dogmas, events, and beings in the realm of alienation. Although it is its own work, a perversion of the human faculty of rational differentiation, this whole heavenly structure appears God-given to the theological consciousness. Since it operates within the sphere of religious alienation, theology is ridden with contradiction, but as a human science, using the faculty of reason, it attempts to develop a harmonious structure in the miraculous world. This tension between human science and irresolvable, grotesque mysteries is

characteristic of the theological consciousness, and is the product of its own nature as the alienation of reason: 'Without this simultaneous presence of these contradictions and of the heavenly harmony the theological consciousness as such would not exist.'<sup>52</sup>

To the theological consciousness Biblical revelation and religious tradition exhibit utter positivity and externality: as mysteries imposed by God they are totally impenetrable to reason. Unaware that all these mysteries, the harmony of the beyond as well as the contradictions of religious dogma, are the products of its own split consciousness, the theological consciousness can express its tension only by the overflow of savage energy against its critics, revealing its fully pathological character: 'the theological consciousness, once it has become real energy, is desire, wild lustfulness and brutality, and it expresses itself in this aggressive spirit against its critics'.<sup>53</sup> To resolve all these contradictions by looking for their origin in the self-consciousness itself, in the mind of the evangelist, or in the conditions of the age that gave birth to a particular religious doctrine, would end the illusion that the theological consciousness deals with the facts of a real world, but to do so would dissolve this consciousness itself, a step it can never allow. By refusing to examine the mysteries that it had itself set up, it is forever incapable of rediscovering mental freedom. The final misfortune of the theological consciousness is that it can never free itself from human nature: it remains, despite its alienated character, a human product, and so the ultimate purity of religion can never be reached. As an alienated human activity it still remains bound to the earth.

'It is its misfortune that it must develop all its own consequences and bring to light all the manifestations of the religious consciousness. It is human, a denial of humanity that proceeds from man himself . . . thus it can find no peace until all the inhumanity of man is revealed.'<sup>54</sup>

All of these sorrows and contradictions go together to make up 'theological joy', the joy of utter resignation and self-abandonment, in contrast to the creative joy of the self-consciousness: 'Self-consciousness is joyful, even in its labours. The theological consciousness is eternal pain, and even its pleasures are poisoned by this pain.'<sup>55</sup> Knowing that it is itself the origin of all cultural forms, the self-consciousness is happy in the confidence that it can transcend its own past works, while the theological consciousness, accepting its own works as God-given, forever remains trapped within their mysterious and perverted circle.

#### 4. BAUER'S CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH: 'SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS' IN OPPOSITION TO 'SPECIES-BEING'

In opposition to religion, Bauer attempted to reach an understanding of human nature by concentrating on the characteristics of the critical self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is developed by dialectical struggle, by the fight to recapture the alienated potential of man from religion. The conflicts of history are essential to the realization of genuine humanity: 'man as man is not a product of nature, but the work of his own freedom'.<sup>56</sup> It is part of his destiny that man 'comes into conflict with himself in historical development – he must bring this conflict to an extreme before he can achieve harmony with himself'.<sup>57</sup> Human nature is not to be defined by a static group of qualities, by a supra-historical essence, but preeminently by the law of self-transcendence, by its ability to subject itself and its products to criticism and to express itself in constantly new ways. The struggle of self-consciousness against substance is the effort of what is genuinely human to remain aware of its own superiority over the world of its own creations and of inanimate nature. But in contrast to the theological consciousness, which attempts to destroy nature by belief in miracles, the critical self-consciousness accepts the givenness of nature while ridding it of its immediacy. Its labour to reproduce the characteristics of the world in their purest form, to transcend nature while avoiding the rupture with it that is characteristic of religious alienation, shows the difficulty of the task the self-consciousness sets itself, to struggle against the rule of the given, to break down the structure of unfreedom in the mind and in material reality, while at the same time never to set up an ideal over against this world, to remain an inner-worldly transcendence:

'self-consciousness is the death of nature, but it brings this death to nature immanently, in the recognition of its laws, although it is the suspension and negation of nature. The spirit ennobles, honours and recognizes that of which it is a negation. The spirit . . . works through nature's law and through this difficult labour brings it to life in its own consciousness in a new delineation, in a form that it did not have in its natural immediacy. In short, the death of nature in the self-consciousness is its resurrection, not the abuse, mockery and ridicule that it suffers in the miracle.'<sup>58</sup>

The act of criticism is not merely the pretension of the spirit to be far above nature, but rather the attempt by the spirit to involve itself with nature, to grant nature freedom to develop its own potential and to take on the attributes of the spirit itself. Criticism liberates nature from the grip of 'substance' and demonstrates the continuity between

it and the transcendent activity of self-consciousness. Bauer's understanding moved in the opposite direction to that of the German romantics. While the romantics viewed the forms of nature as a concrete representation of divine mysteries, the spiritual substance to which the responsive individual soul fled from its own loneliness and lack of meaning, Bauer sets up the critical and conscious mind as the apex of the spiritual universe, and sees the fulfilment of nature in its activity:

'criticism is the movement and development of the self-consciousness . . . in which the contemplator, the subject, and the contemplated object are posited as a unity . . . the power which first allows the object to be itself, which really creates it and which achieves its power through this creative activity.'<sup>59</sup>

Although Bauer consciously derived his subjective idealism from Hegel, he was critical of the separation Hegel's philosophy implied between the 'notion' and the self-consciousness, where the notion developed the appearance of a distinct power and 'because of its power over the self-consciousness can become the object of religious worship, albeit a logical one'.<sup>60</sup> Yet those who reproach criticism with a similar charge simply reveal how far they have been left behind by the rapid sequence of events in the radicalization of Hegel: criticism itself, rather than becoming a deified concept, returns man to himself as the source of all intellectual constructs. Through the activity of criticism man has come to understand 'the self-consciousness as the unique creative force in the universe — as the universal itself'.<sup>61</sup> Science becomes the key to the unity of the species and the death of egoism: 'science elevates self-consciousness to that standpoint where it is simultaneously the consciousness of the world and knows itself as the universal essence'.<sup>62</sup> Far from assuming an arrogant and megalomaniac stance, the true critic performs the work of reason with humility. Those who accused Bauer of self-centredness were unaware of the 'simple, unaffected purity of mind which is the condition and reward of criticism'.<sup>63</sup> The effect of religion is to divide mankind into warring sects, to set up boundaries outside of which no love or communication is possible. The law of belief dominates the law of love and makes impossible the development of a species consciousness. Each sect is made aware of its own instability by the existence of others, so that its activity is concentrated more and more on the repressive fixing of its own lines of demarcation. Thought, by contrast, is an activity common to the whole race and it is capable of uniting the race. In intellectual activity, man transcends the limitations of his personal situation and becomes aware of the vast potential of the human consciousness:



'in thinking, in writing, in the fiery urge of criticism, I no longer live for the sect and its presuppositions, but for the human species and its freedom. Thought is truly a species-activity, the birth of spiritual man and, indeed, of humanity itself.'<sup>64</sup>

Bauer's relationship to the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century was ambivalent: it was they who had developed the criticism of traditional institutions that had made the French revolution possible, and they who had destroyed the whole structure of religion by demonstrating the complete involvement of man in nature. For the radical *philosophes*, atheism had been implied by materialism, since the world of nature had been thought to be completely self-contained and the hypothesis of the existence of God quite uncalled for. But by remaining materialists, the *philosophes* continued to think of reason as a simple reflection of nature, developed by experience and recollection. They did not realize that the final overcoming of religion lay in the self-consciousness itself, 'the solution to the riddle of Spinozistic substance, the true *causa sui*',<sup>65</sup> that nature itself is a modification of reason, an immediate form of the activity of self-consciousness. Conceiving man as an item of nature, as a static set of properties, they failed to see that this nature is purely the product of man's own history, that the self-consciousness has its own existence in creativity and must be distinguished from its works. For man defined as the embodiment of reason, history is all and nature only the transient product of history. The mistake of the *philosophes* lay in viewing man 'anthropologically, as a definite thing, as a subject determined by nature . . . they overlooked his higher identity as the spirit of a people and his free self-definitions in history, art and science'.<sup>66</sup>

In *Die gute Sache der Freiheit* Bauer had indignantly rejected the claim of his critics that those who attempt to destroy religion will end by setting up a new one in its place. The end of religion must also be the end of any glorification of one aspect of human nature and activity over others, the end of all systematic attempts to imprison the fluidity of the self-consciousness in an ideological system. Bauer's concept of *Kritik* implied no programme other than radical freedom of thought: its content was left totally open to the future. The fullness of humanism was to avoid defining humanity in any more restrictive terms than free self-consciousness:

'the accumulated riches of humanity, the state, art and science, which make up a whole, a system, and among which none has any absolute or exclusive role, none may hold exclusive sway, if it is not to become a source of harm — all these riches must now finally be liberated for their own free development, after their fight to the death with religion, the expression of their imperfection, which sought to dominate them . . . mankind wants no more exclusiveness.'<sup>67</sup>

The definition of man as a radically historical being who could not be understood in any terms other than his own activity was understood by Bauer as a rejection of Feuerbach's humanism. Feuerbach's elevation of the species as an ideal for the individual implied for Bauer its divinization. Feuerbach had understood religious alienation as the transference to an imaginary divine of the qualities proper to the human species. These qualities made up a totally unhistorical and essentialist concept of man. At the same time, Feuerbach had unashamedly spoken of the species as the true divine for the individual, once more setting up an ideal over against the only really existing human constant, the activity of the self-consciousness.

For Bauer, Feuerbach's concept of man as a species-being (*Gattungswesen*) and his concentration on the I-Thou relationship as the true expression of human nature had made the social group the fundamental ideal of free thought, the liberation of man's social being – considered as a unified group – as the ultimate goal of liberation from religion and, indeed, as the true content of all historical religions. The followers of Feuerbach – Ruge, Hess and Marx – had all equated the post-Hegelian critical task with political and social freedom, and had developed a concept of *praxis* opposed to Bauer's, since it depended on a relationship to the social masses. Whether it was Ruge's 'movement of the masses in accord with theory' or the discovery of a new source of theory in the practical experience of the proletariat that Hess and Marx were making, the union of theory and *praxis* that saw the realization of philosophy as the creation of a new social order through the liberation of a social class which would at the same time give social effect to universal values – for Ruge the *Bildungsbürgertum* and for Hess and Marx the proletariat – was rejected by Bauer as the emasculation of pure *Kritik*. His relationship to politics, always ambiguous, became clearly negative by 1844. In *Die Judenfrage* Bauer had maintained that a free state was impossible so long as religion continued to exercise any influence beyond that possible in small and isolated private groups. This essay had effectively rid him of the sympathy of the liberals. Marx's answer to Bauer, in his *Zur Judenfrage* (1843), was not less concerned with religion as a crucial sign of unfreedom, but rather viewed the radically republican state Bauer imagined as a purely provisional idea that still fostered alienating conditions and therefore could in fact co-exist with religion, while communist society, an ideal that Bauer never recognized, by making genuinely human emancipation possible, would effectively abolish religious alienation. Further, Marx understood religion to be the product of alienated material conditions, while Bauer believed religion to be itself a crucial cause of human bondage.

The critical battle that Bauer had waged against religion had seemed to him to merit the attention of all free thinking men, and he had expected strong popular support for his cause against the attempt to relieve him of his academic post at Bonn University. Yet on returning to Berlin from Bonn, Bauer discovered what little effect the Young Hegelians had had on public opinion, since the matter was simply ignored.<sup>68</sup> This experience prejudiced him against the possibility of harmonizing the needs of the masses and the demands of free thought: the hopes of the followers of Feuerbach that a liberation of the oppressed social classes could lead to the fulfilment of the ideals of freedom derived from Hegel must, for Bauer, founder on the irreducible apathy of the masses. To subject the pure categories of free thought to their influence was to risk their reduction to triviality and materialism.

In his essay *Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik?* (*What is the Present Object of Criticism?*) Bauer's abandonment of politics was made explicit. Looking back on the events of the last few years, Bauer noted that the new ideas presented in the radical journals had ended the purely literary status that ideas had held up to that time, and had provoked people to make radical decisions. But the novelty of these ideas, their thoroughness and iconoclasm, had provoked some people to the false conclusion that the theoretical task was complete and that the ways of *praxis* could now be made clear. This was, however, to fall into the embrace of the established order, which was itself incapable of theory but well-equipped to resist an immature *praxis*. At the first real blow by the forces of reaction, the 'mass of enlightened ones' was dispersed, separated from theory and devoid of direction. True theory had never been assisted by the mass of liberals. Despite the fears of the regime that they were united with *Kritik*, 'the quest for knowledge was never more alone than at the time when its enemies nursed the fear that all the world had taken up its cause'.<sup>69</sup> Theory had always tried to avoid catchphrases, had never flattered the masses or expected their applause, but at one stage this had gone unnoticed and theory, pure *Kritik*, had been forced to accept common cause with the masses:

'since it was not yet fully capable of ridding the mass of the conviction that it had a common cause and interest with criticism. Despite the fact that criticism had subjected liberalism itself to decomposing analysis, people still found it possible to see criticism as a special variant of liberalism, perhaps as its most extreme conclusion; despite the fact that its authentic and decisive developments transcended politics, criticism still fell foul of the illusion that it was a political activity and it was this illusion that won for it most of this friends.'<sup>70</sup>

The result of this was 'general alienation' when *Kritik* revealed its true priorities, as in the essay *Die Jugendfrage*.

The initial achievement of criticism had been to show that the imperfections of man, which had hitherto been transformed into the distorted world of religion, must be re-internalized so that they could become the object of man's efforts of self-transcendence. For Bauer, it was characteristic of the errors of the first years of the Young Hegelian literary campaign that this seemed political. The critical self-consciousness was 'forced for a moment to identify the human essence with politics'.<sup>71</sup> Criticism was still involved in developing itself through opposition, in realizing the extent of its own radicalism. After grappling with the political question, it became clear to it that political solutions were only fantastic expressions of the true ends of criticism:

'those who, already in advance, finish the struggle with their antagonist, without ever really taking his measure, are immediately ready with utopian phrases — although they think themselves as already reaching a satisfactory conclusion, the grim truth that they are not even clear about the foundations will soon be evident.'<sup>72</sup>

*Kritik*, on the other hand, had kept its goal clear enough to realize that liberal phenomena like the declaration of the rights of man were only foretastes of the true possibilities of freedom.

Bauer's attack on the followers of Feuerbach was as much related to his critique of substance as his critique of Strauss had been. Philosophically, Spinoza had dominated the eighteenth century, since his concentration on the idea of substance was common to materialism and to deism. Allied with the reaction to the French revolution, this Spinozism became romanticism, but its association with the revolution produced the cult of the masses as the source of liberation. Spinozism in its radical and conservative variants was the subordination of the free spirit to the priorities of nature and matter, of positivity. For Bauer, the 'masses' were in this sense as much unfree nature as was the Schellingian emphasis on reason's subordination to existence. The present task of criticism was to subject the masses themselves to analysis and to show how little they had in common with the ultimate possibilities of freedom. The mass is the product of the enlightenment of the eighteenth century, of the political enlightenment, and is 'the natural enemy of theory, which attempts to transcend the tradition of the last century'.<sup>73</sup> The systems of the French *philosophes* and of their followers in Germany had in common an acceptance of the mass, in its unreformed simplicity, as material for a human revolution. At the time of their greatest disappointment, when it became clear that the *fiat* of the regime's censor was sufficient to suppress free thought, German radicals again received the idea from France that the liberation of the oppressed social classes represented an ideal unity of philosophy and the popular masses, of theory and practice.<sup>74</sup> They did not realize that

'a spiritual being cannot be elevated unless it is changed and it will not allow itself to be changed until it has offered the most extreme resistance. We must struggle with what we wish to exalt.'<sup>75</sup>

The only intellectual property of these social radicals became 'the organisation of the masses'. The struggle of criticism with the masses is the struggle constantly to redefine the task of liberation, to avoid the equation of the goal of political and social liberation with the liberation of man himself which only a radical spiritual rebirth can achieve. The phraseology of the 'organisation of the masses' satisfies immediate desires for change, but can never hope to achieve a definitive revolution of values. The wooing of the masses represents the final debasement of philosophy:

'the mass wants simple concepts, so as to avoid facing the real issue, shibboleths, so as to have a ready answer to everything in advance, jargon, as a means of destroying criticism. Philosophers were predestined to fulfil this heartfelt longing of the mass.'<sup>76</sup>

Bauer's critique of any movement of liberation that would attempt to use one element of the established world — an oppressed social class — to overthrow the conditions of slavery that dominated it, was made of socialism as well as of the organic theory of evolutionary political change that was opposed to his advocacy of revolution in 1842. If objective relationships are so thoroughly perverted that all parts of society are affected, then how can change come from any of the component groups of that society? Only a total rejection of the spiritual premises on which all historical societies are based can hope to prevent the counter-revolutions that must follow if any unreformed element of the past is employed. The masses are incapable of such a revolution, since they share in the spiritual malaise that only free self-consciousness can cure:

'if existing conditions are utterly antagonistic to the idea, where else can it exist save in pure self-consciousness, which has rescued itself from corruption and has in itself the true forms of its existence?'<sup>77</sup>

In *Die Gattung und die Masse* (*The Species and the Mass*), Bauer subjected socialist thought to a further critique, as well as attempting to show its intimate relationship to the errors of Feuerbach's philosophy. The elevation of the mass to a new and decisive category cannot hide its primitive and unspiritual character: the modern proletariat is a crude agglomeration produced by the dissolution of all previous specific differences and relationships. The anarchy of economic competition has reduced the architectonic of traditional society to a formless heap, unrelieved by variation and individuality:

'the mass is the collapse of the species in a heap of individual atoms, the product of the dissolution of the particular boundaries which formerly, it is true, cut individuals off from each other, but at the same time united them in a varied system of relationships; the mass is the element of matter, the rubble left by the disintegration of an organic form.'<sup>78</sup>

The atoms of this mass, reduced to slavery by manual labour, feel the pressure of economic circumstances as an absolute and elemental power, one that they can scarcely come to clear comprehension of and therefore cannot effectively oppose. Yet with the collapse of the radical democratic movement and of the free-thinking journals, the followers of Feuerbach have turned to the masses as a new tool for realizing the species nature of man.

The recourse to the masses was prepared for by Feuerbach's concentration on the *Gattungswesen* as the core of a new humanism. For Bauer, Feuerbach's attribution of quasi-divine qualities to the species, indeed, his hope that the categories of religion could be retained and re-applied to the species, necessarily reduced the individual to powerlessness and despair. If the species is the form of transcendence in which the individual can find consolation for his own radical limitations, if the 'truly human' can only be found in the species and not in the imperfect actions of individuals, then the species had clearly resumed the role of the religious absolute:

'What is authentically human in man becomes a kind of limit, which is, indeed, unreachable, and man's perfections, which stand over against him as hypostases or as dogma, can become at most the object of a cult or of a belief, which would positively require a category of absolute imperfection to which these human perfections could damn man himself from their heavenly throne.'<sup>79</sup>

Such a transcendent essence becomes a power not subject to the demands of *Kritik*. An examination of history shows that the species has always chosen to express itself in radically different ways, and contemporary history shows no sign of ending the crucial variations in individuality.

For Feuerbach, the individual indentifying himself through social labour with the species achieves a union with his own essence. For Bauer, however, dedication to the idea of the species hides the true character of most of contemporary labour as slavery to a mechanism. Feuerbach's attempt to realize the individual within the species must, for Bauer, give way to a critical re-examination of what hitherto has been thought of as the content of human nature, particularly since it is historical human nature that has led to the radical division of labour, resulting in soulless mechanical drudgery. Bauer expresses his confidence that the spirit will discover a way out of this crisis, that the

inhuman pressure of atomizing labour will stimulate the creation of new social forms. Yet he rejects the socialist solution as a type of despairing of freedom: to concentrate all organization and authority in a centralized political institution reduces the power of thought and will to one point high above the anonymous plain of society. Such a society is formed from above, is not self-possessing: in an intensification of the gulf between individual and species that Feuerbach had set up, 'the species-relationship remains and becomes only more restricting, since the universal power of the species has transformed itself into an executive authority'.<sup>80</sup> For Bauer, the likely outcome of the new economic processes will not be a new humanism based on the social ownership of the means of production, but an alliance between the masses and the increasingly monopolizing forces of capitalism: 'will the mass, which knows nothing higher than its sensuous existence, hesitate to subject itself to capital, which assures it work and life?'<sup>81</sup> The alliance between economic power and the materialistic mass will present a united obscurantist front against self-consciousness, once again throwing into relief the loneliness that is its true destiny.

The social utopia of the communists imagines the disappearance of state authority with the end of class society, but the dream of anarchy, the full realization of the revolutionary trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity, must soon produce totally unexpected results:

'the mass of free brothers can assure its freedom and equality only be a constitution which will decide by basic principles all questions relating to food, clothing, accommodation, marriage, the family and labour — in short, through a constitution which will abolish freedom even in the smallest things . . . the unity of society will no longer be disturbed, since there will be only *one* dogma prevailing in it and this dogma, as the expression of the whole truth, will dominate every member of this fraternity equally.'<sup>82</sup>

The negation of all other classes of society, the affirmation that all value is created by the proletarian, will be the foundation of a society based on one truth, on one image of man. But this society, affirming the radical unity of man as a *Gattungswesen*, must eventually experience the force of individual differences that the spirit creates. The masses will be incapable of reaching happiness with the simple creed that all men are essentially the same. The need of the species to affirm the variations of its members must eventually be recognized by the mass society, and if this need is not willingly recognized, it will be experienced as a 'threatening power':

'all these attempts end, then, in an inevitable war of the crowd against the spirit and the self-consciousness, and the significance of this war will be no less than the outcome of the battle of criticism with the species.'<sup>83</sup>

For Bauer, Feuerbach's reaction to Hegel was similar to that of the 'positive' philosophers, Schelling most of all. His critique of Hegel had begun at the same time, although probably without a knowledge of the similarity of his ideas with theirs. Both concentrated on religious problems to the exclusion of politics and history, which is why their philosophies, lacking detailed criticism of contemporary events, had become merely repetitive. The fundamental question that they both attempted to resolve, and which Hegel had left ambiguous, was the relationship of subjective spirit to the absolute. The 'positive' philosophers had decided that Hegel had taught pantheism, and that he must be reformed to harmonize with sacred revelation. This implied a fully personal relationship between God and man, both considered as distinct entities. For Feuerbach, in his *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (*Thoughts on Death and Immortality*), the answer lay in attributing the fulfilment of the individual to the species. Feuerbach and the 'positive' philosophers belonged together since they both subjected the subjective spirit to an infinite, either God or the species: the ambivalence of Hegel had been resolved against the freedom of self-consciousness. In opposition to these two theories, Bauer maintained 'there later emerged the idea of pure personality, as the author of its own essence and characteristics',<sup>84</sup> that is, his own theory of the self-consciousness that constantly transcends itself by the aggressive use of free thought.

Feuerbach had failed to grasp the character of modern humanism, in Bauer's view, in his attempt to fulfil anything worldly by declaring it religious. His inability to develop a radically new foundation for humanism went hand in hand with his lack of sensitivity to history. The simple opposition of individual and species was incapable of dialectical development, since no force was allowed for that could call the species to self-transcendence.<sup>85</sup> The historical developments that Feuerbach sought to deny as 'unnatural' are in fact consistent expressions of human nature, which is itself only the transient and contemporary result of the historical dialectic. For Bauer, Feuerbach's cult of the species, and all religious dogmatism before him, had been built on this anti-historical understanding of nature, on the failure to understand that all forms of transcendence have only temporary status in the ongoing work of self-consciousness to achieve self-expression:

'since it is part of the essence of mankind to achieve its own unity through setting up an opposition of its universality as both essential to and alien to its individuality, and by subjecting the essence which has introduced this split to criticism.'<sup>86</sup>

For Bauer, once Hegel's foundation of human essence in an absolute had been rejected, there could be no justification for positing a human 'nature' which was distinguishable from the actual historical behaviour of human subjects.



## 5. CONCLUSION: RELIGIOUS ALIENATION AND THE HUMAN SUBJECT

The atheism of Bauer and Feuerbach, their critique of religious alienation and attempt to lay the foundations of a new humanism, was the philosophical core of Young Hegelian radicalism, the source from which Hess, Ruge, Marx and Stirner drew the ideas which, whether by acceptance or rejection, could become the premisses to their own thought. Yet from the beginning the ideas of Bauer and Feuerbach showed complex differences which soon led to an irresolvable opposition: Bauer's thought had constantly grappled with the problem of intellectual freedom and this had had important political implications, since he had understood the enlightened state as the guarantor of that freedom in opposition to the Church. Feuerbach, on the other hand, had discussed the relationship of religious ideas to the human species, attempting to show that a full awareness of the power of the species would make the ideal of the divine superfluous. He had made little attempt to clarify how this power should be realized in the political and social world. Yet Feuerbach's thought, because it understood human activity as a complex of natural relationships inspired by spontaneous mutual concern, provided a foundation for theories of political and social unity that was influential on Hess and Ruge in particular and which became an important factor in the development of Marx's theory. The initial relationships of Bauer's and Feuerbach's ideas to questions of political and social change were thus soon reversed.

Feuerbach had attempted to restore religious categories to what he saw as their true purpose, rather than to destroy them. He realized that the religious consciousness was the most powerful inspiration to ethical action, and Ruge and Hess were both to develop this theme to the full. For Ruge, religion remained constantly relevant in the secularized form of a 'practical passion for the ideal', while Hess made the ideal of a 'religion of socialism' a key element in his communist catechisms. The attempt to preserve religious categories and the emphasis on the social group characteristic of Feuerbach both contributed to the notion of *praxis*: the creation of a new form of ethical life could have basic philosophic premisses, but depended on moral commitment if it was ever to have the energy to intervene in history. This commitment could be derived from the religious disposition, which had simply replaced the false theological content of its worship with the true anthropological content. The realization of this anthropological content related naturally to the needs of a social group, whose freedom and fulfilment was seen as the elimination of the sources of religious alienation. Philosophy had developed an ideal of human nature, with which the ethical force of secularized religion could transform the life of the masses.

The relationship between Bauer's critique of religious alienation and his espousal of political freedom in the years between his first avowal of atheism and his attack on Feuerbach are more complex. It is difficult to assess whether the experience of having his intellectual freedom restricted without support from the liberals was a crucial factor in setting Bauer against politics as a means of realizing his humanist ideal, or whether he had always understood political freedom only as a guarantee of the fundamental spiritual freedom that he sought. Yet the development from *The Christian State* through *The Good Cause of Freedom* and *The Jewish Question* to *What is the Present Object of Criticism?* has its own consistency. As Bauer had stressed in the later essay, the cause of criticism was identified only conditionally with politics. The secular humanist state recommended in his essay *The Christian State* had been betrayed by his dismissal. In *The Jewish Question* liberalism was subordinated to atheism. By 1844 Bauer's rejection of liberalism and socialism was made clear, and in *Russland und das Germanentum (Russia and the Teuton)* (1853) he pessimistically rejected the whole Western heritage.

For Bauer, the achievement of social and political freedom, even of the kind imagined by Hess and Marx, could not be sufficient to end the effects of religious alienation – particularly since both Hess and Marx had accepted Feuerbach's quasi-religious notion of species-being. In his *Christianity exposed* Bauer affirmed that the fundamental source of unfreedom was religion itself, that the phenomena of alienation could be abolished not by social and political change but rather by the elimination of the temptation to think in any terms other than the historically creative and self-transcending human subject. His anti-religious passion relativized all social and political concern:

'Religion is the passivity of man elevated to its essence – fixed, objectified, willed and constructed. It is the most intense suffering that he could inflict on himself; it is the quintessence of man's fear and the poverty and emptiness of his spirit, the wretchedness of the world become concrete, willed and objectified. The perfection of religion is the perfection of the world's wretchedness.'<sup>87</sup>

Bauer felt his own revolutionary project to be as far above the limited sphere of politics and society as Christianity had always understood itself to be, since he considered modern, critical humanism to be a spiritual calling as lofty and demanding as Christianity and of even greater world-historical importance. A spiritual revolution that had succeeded in recapturing the human consciousness from religious alienation could not be restricted to the fulfilment of the needs of the masses nor to the priorities of the liberals.<sup>88</sup> Just as he understood Christianity to be the spiritual product of an age of immense cultural crisis, so Bauer expected

the early nineteenth-century world, marked by the crisis of political and industrial revolution, to produce a final and definitive human self-consciousness that would for ever break the grip of religion. He was right in thinking that the ideas of his age were crucial, but the faith of the new age was to be concerned with the masses, with Marx's adaptation of the *Kritik* of religion to political economy, rather than with his own elitist intellectualism.

Like Nietzsche after him, Bauer sought a humanism that denied both religious and social transcendence, that could re-define humanity in a way which would not deny the validity of any of man's cultural creations or the complete spiritual self-rule of the individual. Bauer's *Kritik* can be compared to Nietzsche's 'revaluation of all values', but his emphasis on the historical process, on man as a constantly self-transcending historical *Geist*, remained faithful to Hegel, and had little in common with Nietzsche's fatalistic 'eternal recurrence'. Bauer's *Russland und das Germanentum* sought solutions outside the world of Western culture, and thus abandoned the heritage of Idealism, but the final paragraph of the book bore witness to Bauer's continuing search for the ideals of the early 1840's. Socrates, Jesus and Descartes had all introduced a new age by their radical, cataclysmic negativity. These lonely prophets had made possible a new man by their courage in destroying the old. The need of the present age was for a final hero of the negative:

'If the three great turning points of history were when Socrates praised his own ignorance in defiance of theocracy, when Christianity put the individual soul above all things in opposition to the *Imperium* and when Descartes resolved to doubt everything – if these heroic deeds of negation were the creation of new worlds, then the last and most difficult purpose which still remains is to will nothing, to want nothing of the old world, and thus finally to give man full rule and sovereignty over the earth.'<sup>89</sup>

What, for the young Hegel, had been the 'positivity' of religious forms, became for Bauer their alienating power. Both descriptions referred to the pathology of other-worldly symbols which expressed the abandonment of human self-confidence. Hegel had transcended his youthful critique by discovering the subject's dependence on an infinite substance, which could be mediated in ways which were not 'positive' or alienating but rather liberating and fulfilling. After rejecting Hegel's notion of absolute spirit, Feuerbach set up man's species nature as the true substance, the true milieu for the self-realization of the individual. Yet for Bauer this did no more than replace one God with another, especially in view of the fact that Feuerbach and his followers retained the language and style of religion. In opposition to Feuerbach's 'nature', Bauer affirmed the rational subject as the truly human. Once, however,

any notion of substance is rejected, the work of subjectivity itself becomes exclusively negative, in a way that Hegel himself had incisively depicted in his discussion of absolute freedom and the terror. Having rejected both Hegel's union of religion and humanism and Feuerbach's emphasis on the natural social collective, Bauer was restricted to a notion of *Kritik* which could demonstrate the contradiction in social forms – often with great insight, as his critique of communism showed – but make no positive contribution to developing a social or cultural order which would satisfy the freedom and rationality of the subject. There could be no objective order within which subjectivity could be at home, since objectivity as such was understood by Bauer as a limitation on subjective freedom. Bauer's thought corresponded closely to the type of 'pure insight' analysed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, which dissolves the forms of the spirit but has nothing to offer in their place. For Hegel, such 'pure insight' culminated in the terror of absolute freedom, since its consequence was that intellectual and political freedom could be exercised only as a negative and destructive force. In a similar way Bauer's 'terrorism of pure theory' culminated in a cultural nihilism, since the subject was left to will only itself. In Bauer's own words, 'the Ego was now everything, and yet it was empty'.<sup>90</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

## POLITICAL UTOPIA AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

1. RUGE: THE REALIZATION OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY  
IN POLITICAL ACTION

Arnold Ruge, the editor of the *Hallische* and *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, was the leading publicist of Young Hegelian ideas. Assembling the leading radical minds of Germany in his journal, he attempted to draw political conclusions from the critique of Christianity begun by Strauss. Ruge had begun the *Jahrbücher* sharing Hegel's conviction that the Prussian state, which had shown itself to be receptive to the principles of the *Aufklärung* in the past, first rising to international prominence under the patron of Voltaire and surviving the impact of the Napoleonic wars through the enlightened administrative reforms of vom Stein and Hardenberg, could now associate itself irrevocably with the party of freedom. For Ruge, the principles of the journal in its first year were, in the realm of theory 'Protestantism and free science, and in *praxis*, the protestant, modern state'.<sup>1</sup> The journal's defence of the Prussian state in the Cologne controversy over mixed marriages was not simply an attack on the ultramontaniam of Görres, but rather an attempt to delineate the cause of Protestantism as associated with enlightened and progressive principles against Lutheran pietism.

During the reign of Friedrich Wilhelm III, and particularly through the influence of Altenstein, his minister of culture, the *Hallische Jahrbücher* enjoyed a measure of freedom, and Ruge was even promised a professorship by Altenstein if he would end his feud with the orthodox religious party.<sup>2</sup> The accession to the throne of the new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, accompanied by a liberalization of the censorship laws, was for a short time a cause for hope to Ruge and like-minded contributors to his journal, but the king's understanding of his own role was dominated by Romantic political thought rather than by any version of the Enlightenment. Ruge, and all the Young Hegelians, abandoned hope of leading the established political power in a progressive direction, of deducing enlightened constitutionalism and rationalism as the meaning of Protestantism for a modern Prussia, and the *Hallische Jahrbücher* soon transformed its critique of traditionalist orthodoxy as a brake on the state into a critique of the Prussian state itself.

For Ruge, critical journalism and philosophy were linked in a way that was fundamental to the situation of contemporary Germany and which could determine the future. Once the new king had shown that he rejected any association of Protestantism with *Aufklärung*, Ruge had abandoned the attempt to derive progressive rationality from the Christian tradition, and turned to the atheistic philosophies of Bauer and Feuerbach for the sources of a new humanism. German idealism had concentrated on developing an image of man as free self-consciousness, capable of creating for himself a realm of fulfilment, of coming to an awareness of himself as transcending the limitations of his immediate context and achieving unity with the sources of authentic existence. For Ruge, this development had culminated in Hegel's philosophy, interpreting history as the progress of man in the consciousness of freedom, but Hegel had fatally limited the scope of freedom in political life, leaving it encrusted with unresolved elements of the past and abandoning its higher possibilities for the undialectical and problematic goal of absolute knowledge in the purely spiritual realms of art, religion and philosophy. Ruge's aim as the founder and editor of a radical cultural journal was to make possible the final propagation of the ideals of German idealism in a consciously political form, to transform the hard-won, inner philosophical experience into a principle of civic life accessible to a wide public, thereby guaranteeing Germany a progressive future. Philosophy, and cultural life in general, were inextricably linked with the consciousness that men shared in the state, so the purpose of the *Jahrbücher* was to present 'the history of our time as an indivisible whole',<sup>3</sup> to develop political consciousness by exposing it to the achievements of philosophy and literature and by showing that it could share in the same vitality, to bring 'our private knowledge to the public will, our subjective convictions to the *praxis* of reality'.<sup>4</sup>

Through permeating the political world with the consciousness of freedom won by philosophy, Ruge hoped to encourage a concept of the state based on an understanding of the radical autonomy of man. The independence that rationalism had won for man from religion must be accompanied by his ethical autonomy from all forms of sacral politics: for the new man, the state can truly become what Hegel saw it as, the realm of freedom, the highest expression of human unity, the harmony of subjective freedom and public life.

For Ruge, the concept of political freedom derived its philosophical justification from Hegel's philosophy but could only become an active and effective principle by subjecting Hegel to a radical critique. Both Kant and Hegel had developed their philosophies of reason and freedom in an environment of irrationality and subservience, elevating freedom of conscience far above freedom of political action in the

traditional Protestant manner. Hegel's 'reason' was capable of reconciling itself with reality only if it refrained from interfering with it, particularly since absolutism itself was 'reasonable' enough to give official patronage to the Hegelian system.<sup>5</sup> The Hegelian identity of rational and real corresponded to the needs of a state system that rejected the critical claims of rational theory. In many respects, Hegel's model of the state was more liberal than the *status quo* of the Restoration, but he had limited the scope of political freedom by declaring the present age to be the culmination of man's philosophical and political self-awareness, leaving only minor changes to the future.

For Ruge, Hegel's theory of absolute knowledge and his theory of politics had a common defect. To resist the force of criticism that the future must necessarily bring to bear on intrinsically temporal institutions such as the monarchy and the system of estates, Hegel had transformed them into logical necessities, declaring them to be essential aspects of the political whole. Struck by the superiority of the restoration state over the arbitrariness of the *ancien régime*, Hegel had falsely granted it universality.<sup>6</sup> He had deluded himself that the aristocracy could represent the impartial 'substance' of the nation and had falsely opposed mass elections as 'mechanical'. In the same way, Hegel's theory of absolute knowledge contradicted the essentially historical character of his own philosophy. For Ruge, all spiritual activity needed to be directed towards the realization of freedom in the practical political world and no historical situation could ever claim that it corresponded to an achievement of spiritual insight that was definitive, deriving a spurious aura of justification from attempts to show that its essentially time-bound characteristics corresponded to the true priorities and structure of freedom. For Ruge,

'the Hegelian philosophy of right, in order to understand itself as "speculation" or as absolute theory, in order to prevent the emergence of "critique", elevates existing things, historical entities, to logical categories.'<sup>6</sup>

According to his own principles, Hegel should have realized that 'the movement of history itself is an objective critique',<sup>7</sup> and that reason which attempts to justify the present by avoiding the critique that history offers degenerates to powerlessness and sleight of hand, as in Hegel's attempts to show that monarchy was an essential part of political life.

The Hegelian insistence on the impossibility of realizing the content of philosophical idealism by making demands upon history is rejected by Ruge as a failure to appreciate the power of the historical negative and the independence of 'practical idealism'. For Ruge, historical change as the destroyer of all limiting political systems and the con-

sciousness of freedom that philosophy has won are allies: the political idealist does not attempt merely to understand and accept the products of history but rather to consciously force change into the shape imposed by the unconditional ideal of rational freedom.<sup>8</sup> This involved the cultivation of completely different human faculties to those favoured by Hegel, an idealist activism that elevates the moral 'ought' once more to the highest ethical status:

'at the end of every historical development comes the demand for the future, an urge expressing conscience or religious conviction, which transforms the subject's knowledge into a practical passion: it arouses the Fichtean energy of the deed from the lazy contemplativeness of Hegelianism and repudiates all polemic against the moral 'ought', against practical liberalism, against true rationalism, against a thorough and realized Enlightenment. Indeed, the concrete and meaningful 'ought' of the self-knowing historical present is the dialectic of history itself.'<sup>9</sup>

Hegel had attempted to distinguish the spiritual fulfilment of man in the spheres of the absolute spirit from the possibilities of political freedom, but for Ruge no aspect of human activity could be thought of as transcending the achievement of freedom. To speak of political life as limited to the *Rechtsstaat* and to reserve a separate world of absolute knowledge was to set up a false distinction: a given state of knowledge, of spiritual liberation, was not a static, undialectical culmination of spiritual history, but only a temporary freedom from a particular restriction, gained by concrete, willed historical action. Political and spiritual freedom are both subject to the process of historical change and both are capable of endless development. The content of spiritual life, that Hegel saw as transcending political possibilities, can be realized in a political state that truly reflects free self-consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

In opposition to Hegel, Ruge proposed the category of the future as the key of philosophical activity. For Hegel, the task of philosophy was to give insight into the authentic presence of reason in historical reality – the progress of reason did not outstrip material and social reality, but was immanent in it. Ruge retained Hegel's emphasis on the evolution of consciousness, but discerned a hiatus between the dominant progressive *Zeitgeist* and the institutions of concrete life. By the criticism of these institutions, history was kept in constant motion and was impelled to create new forms. Only a negative relationship to the present could bring closer the true inner-worldly realization of the ideal of man that had inspired the Hegelian philosophy: 'The philosopher is an apostle of the future. This is his *raison d'être*. He shakes the dust from his feet, leaving behind him the inheritance of death'.<sup>11</sup> This 'apostolic' task of the philosopher is linked to Ruge's understanding



of religion. For Hegel, philosophy's superiority over religion lay in its use of intellectual rather than affective faculties: it comprehended the same truths as religion, but transcended the use of images and symbols for a conceptual grasp of spiritual reality. Religion's role in the state was to make possible the initial appreciation of the value of the individual consciousness by seeing it in the context of its relationship with the divine, but this was a task that philosophy could more perfectly fulfil once the process of secularization had taken its course. For Ruge, religion did not even attempt similar tasks to philosophy and could not be thought of as a different means of approaching the same subject matter. Religion, in fact, had no specific content of its own, but only that content which science and art, the dominant *Zeitgeist* of any age, gave to it. The defenders of religion's uniqueness sought to proclaim the independence of the Kingdom of God from secular history, not realizing that this ideal had itself been expressed differently in each age. Religion was fundamentally a way of relating to truth, a 'practical passion for the ideal, for the truth'.<sup>12</sup> As such it could express itself immediately in *praxis*. For Ruge, religion was both more and less important than for Hegel: it could no longer claim to relate to any really existing transcendent, but at the same time was not subordinate to philosophy as an inferior form of comprehension of the absolute. Its true function was to provide the ethical activism that Hegelianism lacked.

Religion, then, is the name for that spiritual force that leads men to act in history and to realize ideals, radically distinct from the philosophic contemplation of truth and from the intellectual task of critical dissolution of the established order. Without the category of religion, understood in this sense, political *praxis* is impossible:

'when heart and feeling are full, then at once action will follow. Without a doubt, the reality of religion in the minds of all must be a world-shaking event, a last judgement and the destruction of the established order.'<sup>13</sup>

Religion and the state relate as essence and existence: religion concentrates the *Zeitgeist* into subjective force, into a movement of the emotions, subjecting reality to the force of new ideas. It is the duty of the state to respond to the challenge that religion offers, to realize the higher forms of life that are projected by the practical-ethical attachment to the ideal:

'the state, which is the concrete execution of objective spirit, must not repress to breaking-point the concentration of newly-fashioned ideas in heart and feeling which is religion. On the contrary, it must organise itself, so that its own inner life benefits from this new striving, this crescendo of fruitful development.'<sup>14</sup>

For Ruge, religion's task is to express practical commitment to the ideals that can be discovered in the content of art, philosophy or the state. It may not seek its own transcendent object outside the human world. It was Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* that had expressed the true nature of religion as ethical humanism for the new age of political freedom, finally overcoming the era of romantic religiosity that had been introduced by Schleiermacher's *Reden über die Religion (Speeches on Religion)*.<sup>15</sup> Whereas, for Schleiermacher, religion's genius lay in a feeling of dependence on the infinite, out of which, for Ruge, the whole cult of the romantic beyond grew, Feuerbach had realized that religion had no reference to any being outside man, but was simply the faculty in man that expressed his awareness of his own individual limitations and his dependence on the human species as the horizon of his ideals. For Ruge, the religious character of humanism, that Feuerbach had sought in an act of consciousness, a fundamentally simple conversion of other-worldly to this-worldly, could only be realized in action, albeit intellectual-critical action. Religion was the ethical attachment to the possible content of humanism, that could be realized by the exposure of existing institutions to criticism and by the refinement of the faculty of political awareness.

Ruge's atheism owed most to the influence of Feuerbach and Bauer, both contributors to the *Hallische* and *Deutsche Jahrbücher*. Bauer's influence is discernible in Ruge's emphasis on the role of criticism, but it was Feuerbach that determined Ruge's positive approach to religion – in his own functional understanding of it. For Bauer, the source of historical change was not *praxis* inspired by emotional attachment to an ideal, but the uncompromisingly intellectualist liberation of the free mind from history by destructive criticism. For Ruge, Bauer's criticism of religion had pursued it with a theological fanaticism, never achieving a scientific detachment from its subject. His attack on religion had become a personal crusade, making his own fate crucial to the future freedom of man: 'he is fanatical on atheism's behalf . . . he experiences the history of the world in the history of his own person, his sufferings are the solutions to all questions.'<sup>16</sup> Bauer's *Posaune* had revealed the grotesqueness of the theological consciousness but did not convincingly demonstrate the Hegel had ever fully freed himself of religion. Feuerbach, in contrast, had discovered the true content of the absolute in the human species and at the same time retained the value of the religious consciousness itself.

In rejecting religious dualism and proclaiming the transcendent value of the human species Feuerbach had made the first genuine development beyond Hegel's thought, which had recognized the independence of man but feared to work out its consequences:

'Feuerbach does not merely exclude religious needs from philosophy as if they were something quite alien to it, as the so-called Young Hegelians do, who are driven in their philosophizing by the ruthless pursuit of purely theoretical needs; Feuerbach, rather, makes the positive demonstration that the only possible philosophy of religion must consist in an examination of religious needs themselves, in fact, in a genuine "critique of religious reason".'<sup>17</sup>

Ruge accepted Feuerbach's concept of the species as the true object of the religious faculty, as the 'fulfilled, present infinity'.<sup>18</sup> All of history and, in particular, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had shown the untruth of other-worldly religion, but Feuerbach's account represented a genuine advance on the thought of the Enlightenment, is so far as he provided a justification in humane nature for practical-ethical activity by pointing out the validity of the religious consciousness while at the same time destroying the possibility of dualism, achieving 'the overcoming of Christianity through its own principle – the human principle'.<sup>19</sup> With the abolition of the empty and irrelevant *Jenseits*, religion relates directly to the concrete struggle for human freedom, becoming 'fidelity to the ideal and its dedicated *praxis*'.<sup>20</sup> Religion gives the abstract principle of freedom the power to overcome and abolish established reality, becoming the force of the negative, eliminating all narrow and particular interests to realize the true universality of the idea. The complete transformation of religion to ethical life could give humanism a dedicated and activist character, creating a unity of the species in comparison with which a merely atheistic rationalism was sterile:

'Only an ethical religion, only the complete and selfless dedication of individuals to freedom and to the shaping of the ideal which they have already won in the world of theory, will complete the great reformation of mankind and be its true redemption.'<sup>21</sup>

For Ruge, all of the ideas denounced as heretical that were characteristic of Bauer and Feuerbach could also be found in Hegel. Hegel had resolved the objective existence and transcendence of God into the dialectic of self-consciousness and had grasped religion as the *praxis* of the idea, the realization of the spirit of the age, in opposition to all pious cults and romantic helplessness. But in his own time the new principle was in isolation and suppressed itself by conforming to the restoration state: Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* and *Philosophie der Religion* had abandoned the consequences of radical humanism to wear the mantle of an apologist of the existing religious and political order. For the present generation, however, the new principle had come into its own: it was itself the dominant *Zeitgeist*, the leading idea, and as such was guaranteed victory. For Ruge the task of the philosopher was no

longer to seek a final truth, a metaphysical culmination, but was radically subordinated to history: the dominant ideas of the age had to be grasped and expressed as consequences of the ideal of free, self-realizing humanity, and transformed into the premisses of political action. This involved a thorough relativization of culture to ethical demands: art, philosophy and religion were no longer spiritual activities that could be pursued independently of the struggle for political freedom, nor did they represent a higher world. Religion's meaning had been shown to be the whole man's dedication to the ideal, philosophy's the necessary elucidation of the tasks of *praxis* and the new task for art was to achieve a new realism by portraying the social and historical world rather than the enigmatic illusions of romanticism: none of the freedoms possible in abstract activity were unrealizable in the concrete world of the enlightened political community.

The failure of Hegel to grasp the political consequences of his own thought did not lessen his achievement in freeing Germany from mental fantasy and arbitrariness, in laying a firm ground for the rational pursuit of freedom. Hegel's thought

'by re-defining the whole transcendent world of previous metaphysics as a kingdom of reason, left for us only the task of abolishing the transcendence of reason itself, in order to benefit from its logical certainty and consistency.'<sup>22</sup>

This transformation of all transcendence to a rational order was the surest antidote to the disease of romanticism, which for Ruge represented the worst tendencies in German spiritual life, not only in its reactionary political consequences but in its basic disposition to see reality as ineffable and irrational. Feuerbach's philosophy showed that the true content of the Christian beyond is the human species and its future, while romanticism derived all its strength from an obsession with the elusiveness of the beyond, its 'longing for the infinite' becoming a relationship of isolated spiritual inwardness to a mysterious transcendence. For Ruge, the chief attraction of the spirit for the romantics lay in its inaccessibility and obscurity: 'the principle of romanticism is the beyond of fantasy, the elusive goal, the mystery of things'.<sup>23</sup> Its highest aim is to reduce all the possibilities of freedom to an exquisite interiorized sense of longing, depending on a profound sense of human weakness. The active search for and achievement of freedom is totally unromantic, since it denies the romantic insistence on the inaccessibility of the ideal. Romanticism is the misshaped product of alienation, the return to nature in the abandonment of reason:

'romanticism, indeed, has its roots in the ordeals of earthly life: thus a people will be more romantic and elegiac, the more unhappy its earthly state. If the perpetuation of earthly unhappiness guarantees the yearning for future bliss, it must also likewise be admitted that the fullness of joy, victory, the achievement of freedom, and the high noonday of freedom are not romantic.'<sup>24</sup>

Schelling's return to philosophical prominence in Berlin was for Ruge a major threat to intellectual freedom. Rejecting the Hegelian understanding of history as progress in the consciousness of freedom, Schelling sought to find the ultimate truth by a reactionary undoing of history, preferring the 'primal revelation' of obscure mythologies to the historical progression of freedom from Reformation to *Aufklärung*. The evolution of reason was rejected in favour of a specious mystical wisdom, to be gained by immediate identification with nature. The romantic spirit attempted to embrace the stuff of nature and history without being able to comprehend the rationality of its development, sacrificing its own freedom for the sake of the experience of self-abandonment. Schelling

'has fallen prey to the finite spirit, to nature and historical facts. He has plunged into both nature and spirit without tracing the process which makes and represents them both as the process of thinking reason, and thus he cannot follow this process rationally.'<sup>25</sup>

The romantic disposition combined a positivism which is incapable of giving anything more than ephemeral, affective significance to experience with an arbitrariness affecting all spiritual spheres, most dangerously of all politics. It is 'a declaration of war by the spirit of arbitrariness against the free, lawful spirit of our time'.<sup>26</sup>

For Ruge, the overcoming of religion meant the end of the division between the everyday, human world of private activity and the sacral world of the authoritarian state. The public life of the state, embodied in the quasi-divine figure of the monarch, was held aloof from civil society by the force of the idea of the absolute as distinct from ordinary humanity. The radical humanizing of religion abolishes all abstractions which seek to deprive the concretely existing man of his rightful place as the end and goal of the state:

'the necessary consequence of a critique which makes man the principle of the intellectual and ethical world is the abolition of this separation of the life of the state and the life of human beings: it is the politicization of all men — since all make up the *polis* — and the humanization of the state — every man is the goal of the state.'<sup>27</sup>

The necessary consequences of the Christian state had been the elevation of authentic reality beyond anything that could be realized in the

world, accompanied by the denigration of any freedoms that can be achieved on earth. The ideal of freedom can be expressed only as the most universal abstraction, as all concrete means of realizing it are stifled. But whatever spiritual realm is chosen, the unreformed reality of the world remains. The truth of any abstraction can only be in the attempt to realize it in the concrete conditions of society:

‘This heavenly beyond can only be grounded on earth, and the most remote wilderness, to which a fugitive from the world might withdraw, remains nothing other than utter reality, the world in its real crudity and evil.’<sup>28</sup>

Since the Reformation the state has been held in awe as sheer authority so long as the believer was left undisturbed. The task of modern thought is to show that the genuine realization of the abstractions of spiritual freedom can only take place in the state, to abolish the distinction between state and civil society that Hegel had falsely understood as irresolvable.

For Ruge, the power of the idea was sufficient to direct history towards a fuller realization of freedom, but its cause must be taken up as a conscious and dedicated criticism of reality, not left to the obscure will of the Hegelian *Weltgeist*. The Hegelian radicals had hoped that Friedrich Wilhelm IV would embrace their ideas as the fullest product of the evolution of the spirit, but had been sadly disappointed. The historical necessity of intellectual progress was not enough on its own to guarantee progress in the political realm:

‘We had appealed to the power of the *Zeitgeist*, and in 1840 one could hear everywhere: “What power would accrue to the new king if he made the ideal of the age his own”. Truly the world overestimated the power of the idea at that time.’<sup>29</sup>

Trust in the coincidence of institutional development with the priorities of rational freedom could now only be justified if criticism of those institutions was taken up as an active cause. In his *Selbstkritik des Liberalismus* (1843), the last essay of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* before its suppression, Ruge could only re-affirm his confidence in the power of radical criticism to corrode existing institutions and encourage the growth of a self-aware political consciousness. In this he must have been influenced by Bauer’s even more radical belief that free criticism, independent of any ties with existing reality and of any allegiance to social groups, was the only force capable of genuine change: ‘we must believe in a universal heightening of consciousness, we must never lose our confidence in the terrorism of reason, if we do not want to push away the ground under our feet’.<sup>30</sup> But for Ruge, in contrast to Bauer, *Kritik* was only an essential prelude to *praxis*, only a way of

converting the abstract and contemplative results of Hegelianism into an activist programme, of reducing all cultural activity to concentration on the goal of political freedom.

The German problem was the task of transforming the spiritual riches of idealism into 'a world-transforming passion'.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary German liberalism represented a mere affection for freedom, the disposition of a people that had remained stuck fast in theory, who would appreciate the gift of freedom but do nothing to win it for themselves. Its mildness could never compete with the entrenched power of the restoration state. Liberalism still understood freedom as a granting of rights to the subject by the ruler, as a collection of liberties. But a state corresponding to the self-consciousness made possible by Hegel's thought is not delineated by the will of a monarch but takes its form from the activity of the free spirit itself. The free state is the continually created product of the spirit, just as freedom itself is not a thing that can be given to a nation but rather 'an act of existence, a spiritual constitution, a state of consciousness, which can only be struggled for and conquered'.<sup>32</sup> The freedom of man in the state must, for Ruge, correspond to the fullness of the insight of philosophy into the radically undetermined power of the self-consciousness, unrestricted by tradition and deference to established power:

'The *res publica*, which wishes to be an end in itself and a rational, conscious self-movement, does not express itself in this or that form which might give better guarantees, but rather achieves its uniquely correct form at a blow: the form of the free spirit.'<sup>33</sup>

The theoretical, Protestant freedom, which had reached its *apogée* in Hegel, represented no threat to the state of private individuals and sacred authority, but was simply its reflection in thought, 'a private self-sufficiency of freedom, not in the public community but in the isolated, categorially-schooled self-consciousness of the subject'.<sup>34</sup> Self-satisfied abstract knowledge denies itself the highest task of the free spirit, the conflict with unreformed and stagnant reality, reinforced by the 'practical passion' of radically humanized religion. Philosophy is the essential preliminary to practical freedom: the need to maintain the rational image of man is made clear by the efforts of the romantics to pervert it. But its present task is to become a programme of action, to penetrate the world with its theoretical results and acquire for itself the power of a living movement. The primacy of philosophy as the only means sufficient to reform consciousness itself must be emphasized, against the liberals' illusion that a reform of structures is the essential task. This implies the end of the philosophical and religious indifference of liberalism: a free state can be built only on the most

advanced awareness of human nature, rejecting belief in the other-worldly and any philosophical negations of radical humanism. Philosophy has the duty 'to grasp the universal consciousness and bring it under its control',<sup>35</sup> to create an active and self-conscious political culture, and finally to unite itself with the masses.

The power of philosophy will consist in its identification with the people, in its ability to give expression to their demand for self-determination. The meaning of *praxis* is simply this union of philosophy and the masses:

'The goal of theoretical liberation is practical liberation. *Praxis*, however, is nothing other than the movement of the masses in accord with theory, the heart-beat of the eternally youthful world.'<sup>36</sup>

The true goal of liberalism is its self-transcendence into a fully-fledged, self-confident demand for democracy, the dissolution of the fondness for freedom by the radical practice of freedom. The new freedom, based on the decades-long labours of German philosophy, on the weary overcoming of other-worldly religion and mystical illusion, would not be an accidental, immature product, but one that could provide the basis for a new epoch in human history, an alternative to the 'calculated subjugation of humanity' that has dominated civilization from time immemorial'.<sup>37</sup>

In clear contrast to Bauer, then, Ruge saw the end of philosophy in the formation of a common consciousness of freedom, the spiritual property of the broad masses of the nation, that could be brought to bear on political institutions. He derived from Hegel the notion of a free and progressive self-consciousness but implicitly rejected Hegel's concept of the *Weltgeist* in favour of an emphasis on the *Zeitgeist*, the climate of ideas inspired by the most advanced exponents of free thought, shaping a common consciousness which could itself become the basis of democracy. For Bauer, the idea of *praxis* as 'the movement of the masses in accord with theory' could have no meaning, since the idea derived all its strength from its own critical purity, its own uncompromising destruction of the accretions of the past, and could only be distorted by the co-operation of duller minds. Ruge's concept of the relations between philosophy and the masses sprang from his conviction of the ineffectiveness of isolated theory, the curse of Germany, in contrast to the practical idealism of France. In a culture dominated by the search for a spiritual ideal, the most pressing need was to refute the claim that politics was a mundane and mechanical activity. Hence Ruge's emphasis on the public practice of freedom as the true content of religion, the full realization of philosophy and the most powerful source of art.



Ruge's humanism drew its philosophical justification from Feuerbach's concept of man as a species-being, fitted by nature for social unity, but his use of Feuerbach's ideas did not provide any solution to the problem of the relationship between individual and society and their conflicting rights. His attempts to interpret the idea of a species-being concentrated on the social whole as the primary entity, of which individuals are expressions:

'if the essence is a unity, if knowledge and spirit are one, then the multiple and manifold existence of different subjects is not a duplication of this essence – rather these finite forms of existence, these subjects, are only its realisation.'<sup>38</sup>

Ruge's ideal of democracy as the expression of social unity based on a commonly held free self-consciousness rejected Hegel's insistence on the inevitability of a differentiation of public and private spheres. Yet Ruge retained two basic features of Hegel's thought: firstly, the belief that property was an essential aspect of personality and not necessarily destructive of social unity, and secondly, a preference for regarding the state itself, rather than the individual, as the primary vehicle of the spirit. These emphases were attacked by Hess and Stirner respectively and Ruge attempted a refutation of both communism and anarchism.

For Ruge, Stirner's insistence on the rights of the ego was justified in so far as the ego itself was a source of values, but Stirner provided no context for the ego's action, and in his rejection of any mass movement of change left the established world untouched. Stirner's work was the product of a country so lacking in *praxis* that the call for action arose finally as the battle-cry of the totally self-defining individual. For Ruge, Stirner's individual was the logical conclusion of the development of German idealism. Egoism was the expression of philosophy in concrete action, the fleshly appearance of the Fichtean ego, the real shape of Hegel's *Anundfürsichsein*: 'the whole generation which took up the heritage of Hegel had striven and laboured to achieve this mode of existence.'<sup>39</sup> Significantly, for Ruge, the final product of Young Hegelianism was not man as species-being but as individual. Stirner's philosophy represented the reaction of the common man to the excesses of German theoretical culture: he expressed the yearning to realize all the spiritual riches conjured up by the philosophers by humorously destroying them.

For Ruge, the value of Stirner's egoism could be realized, and its evils avoided, only by involvement in *praxis*. Practical egoism produces a party spirit, which in turn rejects theoretical egoism. Ruge extracted from Stirner the original value of the individual, but he emphasized the need to transcend egoism by involvement in self-forgetful activity, in order to overcome the alien world. The concrete, self-aware individual

is the only possible source of real *praxis*, but once it does involve itself it finds itself linked to the needs of others, abolishing the excesses of nihilism. Stirner provided for Ruge an emphasis on the individual as the beginning of all social relations that modified his understanding of man as a species-being.

His reaction to Hess was much more negative: Ruge saw communism as an attempt to revive the theory of society as an organism characteristic of romantic conservatism, a mystical unity which would abolish the freedom and distinctiveness of the individual. Ruge accused Hess of forgetting that the individual was the only reality of the species, not a means of achieving a hypothetical perfect union. The criterion of community was its effectiveness in providing for the rights of the individual. The abstract universal love of 'true socialism' was rejected by Ruge as a potential source of fanaticism, as the Christian brotherhood of man had been: only love of individuals could have any meaning. Egoistic behaviour was socially destructive only if it lowered others to the role of a means to an end. The actions of individuals seeking their own good was the only possible source of social life: 'an individual's reasonable goal is immediately the goal of all'.<sup>40</sup> The externality of possessed things, the existence of money itself, that Hess hoped to abolish by ending private ownership, was for Ruge an unavoidable characteristic of social life that was not destructive if it was prevented from reducing men to slavery. The socialist emphasis on the economic liberation of man must be accepted but no doctrine of total social harmony followed from this. The true extent of possible social unity was discernible in the general will, which could set up the democratic state as a set of institutions designed to meet the needs of individuals. The communists' rejection of the state in favour of community was expressed in their refusal to recognize the significance of the political struggle. Their assertion that all freedoms would simultaneously be created by revolution and that the efforts to gain democratic freedoms by political means were unnecessary was refuted by their own experience: the denial of freedom of speech by the regime had meant that the communists' meetings at Elberfeld had been suppressed and the opportunity to publicize their ideas denied them.<sup>41</sup> Social change could be achieved through control of the state alone: a fruitful social theory depended on the relationship between the state and the individual, while communism attempted to bypass both, to realize 'the universal in the universal'. Like romanticism, communism was a mystical hope, the product of desperate conditions, having little to do with reality: 'wretchedness is man's utopia, and utopian communism is nothing more than the powerless yearning to elude this wretchedness'.<sup>42</sup> On its own it had insufficient strength to carry out a political revolution, but in times of political instability it would act as the blind destruction of

civilization. Its theoretical constructs had no value, but pointed to the pressing need to abolish poverty itself:

'the religion of real misery, the fanaticism of degraded humanity, is a more terrible thing than any other given birth by our century. It is a matter of the utmost urgency, that the existence of this evil be recognized and that the will to remedy it become universal.'<sup>43</sup>

Ruge had left for Paris after the suppression of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and had attempted to set up the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, a journal intended to assist in the fulfilment of a progressive unity of France and Germany. Introduced to the leading French socialists by Hess, Ruge soon learned that his assumption of the necessary union of atheism and humanism was not shared by them, and the first and last edition of the *Jahrbücher*, edited jointly with Marx, had no French contributors. Ruge soon broke with Marx and Hess, denying that the political character of his opposition to the Prussian regime had been made irrelevant by the social question. In the Frankfurt Parliament Ruge was a delegate on the democratic left, and after its collapse fled to England, where he remained in exile.

Ruge's confident rejection of Hess's ideas in fact implied a radical self-criticism. His own understanding of democracy depended on the same philosophy of human nature as Hess's critique of economic alienation: for Hess, social community was no less related to the needs of the individual than was Ruge's state. Ruge's criticism of the communists's rejection of the political struggle showed a clearer understanding of German reality, but his own critique of existing institutions had been less sensitive to the rapidly developing economic polarization of society. His own vocation had been to arouse the German *Bildungsbürgertum* to political activism, and he had succeeded in developing a democratic political philosophy that could claim some continuity with German idealism.<sup>44</sup> Yet it was Romanticism, rather than a radicalized Hegelianism, which succeeded in determining the philosophical and political attitudes of the larger part of the German middle class. The association of political humanism with atheism drastically reduced its appeal: the circulation of the *Hallische* and *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, which Ruge originally hoped would reach 10,000, never in fact exceeded 500.<sup>45</sup> The Prussian regime had no difficulty in suppressing the freedom of expression of an intellectual movement that had never won the firm allegiance of a social class. Economic developments had rendered the democratic unity that Ruge had imagined, still fundamentally Rousseauist, impossible. By 1848, the industrialization of Germany had produced a class which the German bourgeoisie feared more than the regime.<sup>46</sup> Ruge's rejection of Hess, while correctly pointing

out the utopian characteristics of communism and their origins in desperate poverty, reflected his own failure to develop a political philosophy which could come to terms with the increasingly class character of society.

## 2. HESS: THE TRANSCENDENCE OF HUMAN 'PRE-HISTORY' IN SOCIAL UTOPIA

### a. *The Spirit in History*

Moses Hess, a Jewish autodidact from the Rhineland, was the first to make the attempt to develop out of idealism a philosophy of social action that could resolve the crisis of civilization brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism. The sources of his thought were, first of all, the Bible and the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity and, later, the achievements of philosophical idealism since Spinoza, which culminated for Hess in the work of the Young Hegelians. Hess was to combine the radical humanism of Bauer and Feuerbach with the social messianism that he owed to his childhood immersion in the traditions of Israel. Philosophy itself was situated for Hess within the stream of events that determined the total spiritual environment of the human race. It was one aspect of the process of liberation and of achievement of the consciousness of God that had its greatest landmarks in the founding of Judaism, the witness of Jesus, the German Reformation, and the French Revolution. According to Hess's earliest surviving letters, his greatest source of happiness was insight into the necessity of a moral world-order.<sup>47</sup> The dominance of the divine spirit over man inclined him towards the good, and the gifts that nature had given him could find in society the means to develop to perfection.<sup>48</sup> Hess's ardent conviction of the spirit's guiding presence within the world, and of the infinite dignity of human nature as the vehicle of that spirit, were to inspire all his activity as an apostle of social renewal.

Hess began his literary career with *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit* (*The Sacred History of Mankind*) (1837), a confused and enthusiast tract that nevertheless contained many of the themes that Hess would pursue in all his later works. The *Heilige Geschichte* was dominated by Hess's understanding of the process of salvation: the Holy Spirit, accompanying man from creation onwards, is capable of taking forms which gradually free themselves of religious transcendence and become more and more deeply involved with human activity. For Hess, the original happiness of man soon ended with the growth of the race and the irresistible accumulation of historically derived privileges. The law of inheritance, in Hess's diagnosis, was the destruction of the primeval community and the source of human antagonism ever since.

From the first the future of man was deeply ambiguous: his nature implied a life of antagonism as well as of harmony, but the possibility of response to divine life was open to him for all time. After the flood Noe saw that 'our temporal lives carry from youth the seed of decay, the seed of division and death — but also the seed of renewal through the eternal grace of God'.<sup>49</sup> Hess's understanding of human evil was expressed most often through the idea of disharmony: the meaning of original sin was not in the eating of a forbidden fruit but rather in the clash between those aspects of human development that had already been united into a harmonious whole and those whose exercise threatened to break up the pattern already achieved. The concept of socialism that Hess was to develop in the 1840's was still dominated by this awareness of the ambiguity of human nature and of the possibilities it creates for itself, of the historical need to resolve the contradictions of industrialism into a higher harmony, since the alternative was to accept a world where man's productive capacity was antagonistic to his life in community.

Accepting the conventional historical dialectic of the time, Hess divided human history into a period of conflict, the age of the Son, and a period of possible renewal, the age of the Spirit. Jesus was indeed the Son of God, but the age he had introduced was one of unfulfilled truth. The Church remained separated from the state, since the holy truth had to struggle for life in a desolate world. Inequality among men reached its apogee in the feudal system and struggle and conflict dominated human history, to cease only when all human faculties were resolved into reception of the 'eternal idea'. In recent history two great spiritual landmarks had heralded the possibility of renewal: Spinoza's philosophy made possible a truly spiritual response to God, superseding the superstitious worship of images, and the French Revolution, albeit only a crude beginning, represented the first step in the final regeneration of the human race. With the achievement of true knowledge of God man transcends the restless search for his own meaning and purpose, recovering forever the state of innocence that he had lost. The kingdom of truth, transcending Christianity just as Christianity superseded Judaism, resolves all conflict and guarantees man unending bliss. Signs of this are the insights of Hegel and Schelling into the *Weltgeist* and the *Weltseele* and the union of their philosophies is the union of history and nature. This crowning experience of God is not a new religion, but the extension of an ancient one, the product of the ongoing self-revelation of God that fills all of history.

With the coming of the age of fullness of the spirit, Hess turns his attention to the future, towards the possibility of a human community that might reflect the unifying knowledge of God. Reflecting on human history, Hess seeks to discover what social order all historical

struggle is leading to, in the conviction that the 'sacred history' of mankind implicitly contains the promise of unity. The inspiration of all social association must be the knowledge of God, men's relationship to each other a mutual reinforcement of their search for this knowledge. Ancient Israel represented the possibility in microcosm of such a society, that must now develop to embrace all of humanity. The key to this society will be equality and the central question of the age is the possibility of community of goods, a goal admittedly remote, but one which must be enunciated as an inspiration to social development. What destroyed the original unity of man was the growth of inequality: historical rights allowed the development of an aristocracy of wealth that made all genuine community impossible. Only by overcoming the power of money can man complete the process that has led him out of his original innocence through the necessary struggles of history, to a conscious freedom and unity with God reflected in full community. Present institutions are without foundation, since they are based on the limited spirit of man. Only a grounding in the ever-present Holy Spirit can give man the assurance of his achievements – the Spirit whose 'quiet strength is far greater than the noisy magic of antiquity'.<sup>50</sup>

The present age is dominated by crisis, the mediator of the future kingdom. The growth of industrial capitalism since the collapse of the *ancien régime* has brought about the division of society into two estranged groups and revealed enormous potential for good or ill:

'money is the only lever in society, since free trade and industry have become predominant; and the more these forces progress, the more powerful will money become. This power will be divine, if inheritance is abolished, but devilish as long as the law of inheritance remains in force.'<sup>51</sup>

The new life promised by the French Revolution, that once seemed to dominate the heavens like a fiery meteor, is now exhausted, living on only in the souls of the noblest men, the priests of the coming age, who preserve the sacred fire.<sup>52</sup> Man finds himself cut off from nature, in a world of his own making that is not yet inspired by the spirit, dominated by greed and antagonism. The collapse of all values throws each individual back onto selfish appropriation. Yet this chaos is part of the historical dialectic intended by Providence: the polarity of wealth and poverty is brought to a pitch of intensity as a necessary prelude to its abolition, whether by a common will to change or by revolutionary violence.

In the last section of his work Hess makes explicit the visionary temperament that has driven him to conceive human history in this way. Assuring the reader that his ideas are not mere fantasy, but the product of deep meditation, he claims the status of poetry for his work

since it describes a time when ideal and real will be united. The society that the present age of conflict will bring forth will resolve all the antagonistic forces of history into perfect community. External law and authority will eventually disappear since the people will share in one unified consciousness. Laws will be propounded by a government in which executive and legislature are united, whose authority can be immediately identified with the authority of the people itself. Politics and religion will become one, more fully than in the classical world, since the light of the spirit and the knowledge of God have rendered the state based on coercion superfluous. Once social unity has been achieved the state will disappear to allow the revival of the life of the patriarchs, in which the family, whose relationships are formed by the immediacy of love, will once again become the measure of society. Marriage as legal bond will be abolished by marriage based on true affection. Society will return to the state of nature in a higher, conscious form. In the future man's own spontaneous activity will be sufficient to satisfy all imaginable needs. The divine spirit will lead man through the conflicts of history and the institutions of Church and state which expressed his immature, divided self and restore his ancient unity:

'Out of the old, chaotic world the genius of man will emerge, as if carried by a tide that is moved by the spirit of God. The unity of the consciousness of mankind will be law, a law which will influence and permeate humanity, fulfilling its purpose and bringing its evolution to perfection.'<sup>53</sup>

In *Die europäische Triarchie (The European Triarchy)* (1841), Hess took up once more the theme of the *Heilige Geschichte*, developing it with a much greater awareness of what had already been achieved by contemporary philosophy and applying it more specifically to the European situation. He began the work with a critique of idealism, of Hegel in particular, and of Hegel's radical disciples. The development of the spirit since Spinoza had received a twofold elaboration in the philosophies of Hegel and Schelling. Hegel's philosophy depended on mediation, on the division of nature and spirit. Within it the subject came to full self-awareness in the absolute, but was incapable of going outside itself. Hegel regarded nature as the self-alienated form of the divine idea, but for Hess it is the immediate life of God. In this respect Hess shared Schelling's conviction of the identity of spirit and nature, an identity that is essential for the subject's self-transcendence in action. Hegel's philosophy, 'the culmination of subjective spiritual activity, is similar to its beginnings in ascetic Christianity, in so far as it subordinates nature'.<sup>54</sup> Even the left wing of the Hegelian school had developed only as far as the principle of spiritual freedom: this

final product of German philosophy remained only the very beginning of the new age. Philosophy had brought the subject to self-consciousness, but the relationship between the subject and the world, expressed by Hegel through the mediation of abstract entities, must now take up the immediacy of free action. For Hess the 'absolute spiritual deed', a concept that was to receive full development in his essay *Philosophie der Tat (Philosophy of the Deed)*, was the human activity capable of freely creating the future, just as Hegel's philosophy had concentrated on comprehension of the past.

Hess drew inspiration from Cieszkowski's argument that the future must become the object of knowledge, now that philosophy had come to culmination, but he was critical of Cieszkowski's attempt to justify this simply as a conventional technique of extrapolation from the known to the unknown.<sup>55</sup> For Hess, the future, like all of history, was not the product of God's foreordaining will alone. Since man shared in God's nature, was party to the movement of the spirit, then the future was clear. For Hess, like Cieszkowski, the unique nature of the 'deed' was that it was inspired by an already developed consciousness, while the unfree 'fact' became accessible to consciousness only as an impervious, predetermined reality. Hess's vision of man accompanied by the spirit saw the finite human will, that had no necessary connection with reality, aided by a 'good, enlightened, divine *rational will*: it is this which produces conscious and enduring action. Without it there can be no genuine freedom, no morality'.<sup>56</sup> While clearly dependent on Hegel for this distinction, Hess interpreted this divine 'rational will' as guiding human choices for the future, rather than revealing itself only in the comprehension of the past.

Before discussing the meaning of contemporary history, Hess was concerned to develop awareness of the unrestricted scope of the spirit in history. The sacred history of man is not limited to the ages described in the Bible, but rather extends throughout human history. In the past the spirit worked through nature and the miracle was the sign of his presence. The coming of Christ began the predominance of the spirit that was to end the age of miracles and make possible the self-conscious creation of history by man, no longer a blind tool of nature but sharing the spirit's role as a free determiner of the future. History becomes more, rather than less, sacred when the free, ethical deed, working on the achievements of consciousness, supersedes the miracle and specifically sacred history becomes identified with secular world history. Hegel's greatness was to reveal the past as the creation of the spirit, but for Hess he was never capable of grasping it as the result of free conscious activity. His more radical disciples, by restricting themselves to a rationalist interpretation of the sacred history, had deprived themselves of an awareness of the spirit's action in miracles. Their



attempt to transcend Hegel could not achieve a philosophy of action since by their rationalism they excluded the divine spirit from history. The intellectual freedom exercised by the Young Hegelians had yet to bear positive fruit:

‘positive results must now be sought in a realm other than theory. Free thought cannot reconcile itself with dogmatism. But if philosophy cannot return to dogmatism, then it must, in order to achieve results, go beyond itself to action.’<sup>57</sup>

For Cieszkowski, the free deed could be accomplished only after the culmination of philosophy, but for Hess this ignores the spontaneity of the sacred history, which goes back to the origins of man.<sup>58</sup> The spirit’s work has the character of conscious action from the beginning: at first, in ancient Palestine, it was communicated through prophecy, in mediaeval Europe as mysticism, and now, when history becomes world history, it takes its freest form, as speculation, an activity which for Hess is not to be identified with philosophy, but which rather harmonizes the genius of poetry, prophecy and philosophy and whose chief role is to creatively reinterpret the past as the preparation for a future whose consciously formed shape bestows meaning back on the past. The interdependence of past and future is illustrated for Hess by the development of machines, which he sees as a promise for man of future freedom from drudgery. Just as in the past Aristotle accepted slavery because of the sterility of machines, reducing the living person to the status of a dead tool, so in the future the dead machine will be raised to life. In the past slave labour made inequality inevitable, while the future use of machines will allow the development of a society of absolute equality. The knowledge of the future is a knowledge of the necessary consequences of historical development and therefore can take concrete form, although a prevision of details must be dismissed as fantasy.

Hess closes the introduction to the *Europäische Triarchie* with a final critique of idealism. Rejecting the use of the dialectical method as a sterile game that cannot make the dull and trivial appetizing, he asserts that the final product of idealism, ‘the concrete notion of existence’, is in fact the starting point of the philosophy of the deed.<sup>59</sup> This particular existence is no longer to be conceived as a skeleton temporarily given life and form by the passing visitation of the absolute spirit, but rather as ‘a life-bringing seed of the future’. The culmination of philosophy is not found in meditation upon the abstract spirit of all existence, but in grasping the conditions for future action. Contemplation gives way to inspiration, since the spirit no longer comes to completion in the present but rather compels us to take part in shaping the future. This implies a critique of Hegel’s reconciliations, which, for

Hess, are rendered repellent and unnecessary once the future is given a key role in fully resolving what Hegel could only artificially reconcile. The limitations of philosophy accentuate the fundamental role that the 'free spiritual deed' must now play:

'nowhere, in any aspect of life, is this reconciliation genuine. Even if we were to assume that freedom of thought is already a reality, that the opposition of Church and state is reconciled and even that moral freedom is fully developed, objectively overcoming the opposition of spiritual and materialist ethics – even if all this were granted, still the reconciliation of the starkest reality must be denied even by the greatest optimist. The opposition of pauperism and the aristocracy of money is not only still with us, not only not yet overcome: it has not even reached the pitch of revolution, even though it is already obvious enough. How can there be any talk of an objective reconciliation in a world which on the one hand shows us usurious wealth and on the other poverty consuming itself and sweating its own blood?'<sup>60</sup>

The field of this free, conscious act is necessarily the present and immediate future of European history. The 'European triarchy' is the co-operation of the three great nations of Western Europe: France, Britain and Germany. Hess gives to the decisive events of modern European history a significance surpassing that of the sacred history of biblical times. The dialectic of thought and action is realized for Hess by the European nations themselves: each has a concrete task to perform, since each has been given a unique genius by the spirit. One of the fundamental themes of all of Hess's work was the necessity of a co-operation between France and Germany: examples abound in his essays of exhortations to the intellectual and cultural leaders of both nations to make possible the unity of contemplation and action, of thought and feeling, of spiritual and political freedom that France and Germany, and after them Europe as a whole, can achieve by common action. The significance that Bauer gave to the sufferings of the Roman world as the ground of the alienating religion of Christianity, is transferred by Hess to the present. Hess attributes a crucial salvific role to the conflicts and sufferings of the modern European nations, but the faith they are capable of realizing will not be a retreat from an alienating political situation but rather the invasion of the world of politics and society by the spirit itself, finally reconciling all the elements of history, making possible a sacred politics and a social religion.

The possibility of such a culmination of salvation history was first revealed by the French revolution, the beginning of the free deed, just as the German Reformation began the freedom of the spirit. Since the activism of Rome clashed and mingled with the spiritual inwardness of the German tribes the dualism of thought and action had been the well-spring of history. The French revolution showed that the essence of

freedom had passed from religion to social action, but its significance was in its enunciation of ethical principles, rather than in the achievement of social or political change. For Hess, to think of the French Revolution as the crucial political watershed of the modern world was to court despair, since its failure to overcome the anarchy of individualism led to loss of faith in revolution itself. Rather, its role was to act as a counterpart to the German Reformation and German philosophy in laying the groundwork for the crucial revolution of the future that would bring the work of the modern spirit to completion. Such a revolution must occur in England, the country of greatest social and economic development, and will no longer, unlike earlier revolutions, exercise a 'relative' influence on history, but rather an 'absolute' one. The present age, then, bears the marks of a crisis greater than that when the incarnation occurred: Christ brought the religion of love to self-consciousness, but the imminent revolution will bring it to conscious activity, realizing the content of religion within the world. The theologian's virtues of faith and hope are appropriate only to the New Testament, while the absolute spiritual deed, having the Holy Spirit, the creator of the sacred history, as its foundation, can confidently dispense with scripture and tradition in the immediacy of its relationship to the divine future.

The spirit of the present relates to man in a radically new way. Hess's sacred history is strictly dialectical: only after the complete destruction of the civilization of the ancient world and the metamorphosis of all human relationships could the spirit assume a new form. The sacred history assumes the trinitarian pattern that dominated the German spiritual culture of Hess's day: 'from now God is no longer a stern judge, nor a mild teacher, but rather a spirit that fills and moves us'.<sup>61</sup> The new incarnation of God in the activity of man, the transformation of the physical miracle into the spiritual deed, allows the liberation of the spirit from the Church, of ethical life from the political slavery of the *ancien régime* and, in the near future, of law and social relationships from domination by historical rights. The immediate task for Germany becomes union with France, to make possible a European whole based on a realized co-operation of social and spiritual freedom. The temptation to alliance with Russia that was the heritage of the Napoleonic wars, and the artificial and repressive balance of power imposed by the Congress of Vienna must be firmly rejected. The fulfilment of Hess's ideal of European triarchy must be a salvific act of unique importance:

'Europe is a holy of holies. Do not desecrate it with profane comparisons with North America! Do not burden it with sneaking glances at Russia! Europe is a country like no other on earth. Like Christ, its model, it has offered itself up for man. The chalice of sorrow was given to it in full measure. It is still pale, blood

still drips from its wounds, but in three days it will celebrate its own resurrection. Twice already has the sun risen again after Europe's crucifixion: the German reformation and the French revolution were the first two days of resurrection. One more day like these two and the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled on earth. It is a part of the world that has been chosen, that stands under God's especial protection. Till the end of days not one of its limbs will be broken, no hair ruffled. What the holy Jewish state was to the ancient world, what the Holy Roman Empire was to the middle ages, will Roman-Germanic Europe be to the future: the apple of God's eye, the centre from which the destiny of the world will be determined.<sup>62</sup>

With the newly won spiritual freedom of man the Christian Church becomes incapable of fulfilling the role of mediator of the spirit. In Christianity the Jewish law was fulfilled and universalized, but the Church remained an institution dedicated to the other-worldly, preaching the revelation of the spirit. Before the full victory of Christ it was necessary for the Church to have full power over man, but now that the meaning of Christ has penetrated the world, now that man is capable of acting in immediate unity with the spirit, the state must supersede the Church as the true vessel of the sacred history. In the state the law of love, preached as an other-worldly ideal by the Church, becomes realized within the world, and what was for the Church a future hope becomes the present life of man in the state. Contemporary Christianity has become as sterile as Judaism became once it rejected Christ and lived on without realizing its hope for the Messiah. The Christian hope for a solution to world history coming from the heavenly beyond is a sign of Christians' abandonment of confidence in the victory of the kingdom of Christ within the world. Because of the achievement of the French revolution, the revolution in ethical life, the reality of the world has begun its reconciliation with the spirit, while at the time of Christ the reverse prevailed and religion had to take the form of an other-worldly mysticism. The union of this world and the heavenly beyond in the modern state based on spiritual freedom and ethical action transcends the priorities of religion.

The state, conceived of in this way, must concentrate all power within itself since it is the concrete form of the salvific spirit in the world. From this standpoint Hess criticizes the liberal recommendation of separation of Church and state as well as the abstract individualism of the French Revolution. Individual freedom implies anarchy unless it is played out within the context of a state that is activated by a concentration of the highest power. The duty of the state is to embody the spirit of the age, which, for Hess, is fully identifiable with the spirit of God: on this basis, the state can damage no legitimate rights since it is inspired by the quintessence of justice. Such a state must be dominated neither by abstract reason nor by the search after worldly power,

since its responsibility to the spirit involves the duty of giving a firm ethical basis to political life. Its power and its ethical responsibilities are both developed to a maximum:

'The relationship of the highest power to its subjects cannot be defined according to the number of bayonets it disposes of, nor by the letter of a charter. Everything depends on the spirit that permeates the power of the state . . . State power cannot be judged by the *corpus juris* – it has no other judge than the spirit of God as it is realized in world history.'<sup>63</sup>

For Hess, the state's relationship to the Church should be neither indifferent nor partisan. The unity of civil and religious life is 'the nerve of the social order, the highest power'.<sup>64</sup> To separate them is to invite a return to the mediaeval world of religious mysticism and political chaos. Hess seeks to develop a true unity of state and religion now that all false models have been developed to a dialectical extreme. Ideally, the Church as a separate institution will disappear as an outmoded vessel of the spirit, but in the contemporary world the duty of the state should be to encourage the growth of religion without favour for any denomination and without interference with any man's conscience. The state's advancement of religion can only result in its own decay if it becomes the support of a particular confession. The immediate context of Hess's remarks was a conflict between the Prussian state and the Catholic bishop of Cologne over the issue of mixed marriages, provoking a three-cornered controversy between Joseph Görres, one of the leaders of Catholic romanticism, the *Hallische Jahrbücher* edited by Ruge, and Leo, a defender of orthodox Lutheranism. For Hess, the duty of the Prussian state lay in preserving objectivity towards Catholicism as a confession but at the same time in advancing the cause of the institution of civil marriage, a symbol of the new ethical life that had been made possible by the French Revolution. The institution of civil marriage symbolized the unity of nature and spirit that would now become possible. The opposition of spiritual and natural love that made it necessary for the Church to bless marriages is overcome as the overall dualism of heaven and earth, matter and spirit, is overcome: the immanence of the spirit renders nature itself spiritual. The conflicts arising from the state of nature led to the absolute predominance of the other-worldly spirit, and all of history since has been full of broken attempts to restore unity. Only a state that can resolve all the elements of life, the spiritual insight of Germany symbolized by Hegel and the practical activity of France culminating in Saint-Simon, can represent the highest power, the culmination of salvation history. Finally the tension between Church and state is overcome in the creation of a genuine *Staatsreligion*, breaking up the vicious circle of profane politics and powerless faith:

‘Once the state becomes consciously holy, as it must do according to world-historical necessity, then the absolute religion will be the soul of all social activity and world-historical deeds will be performed which will be greater and more glorious than any that occurred during the time of the relative unity of state and Church.’<sup>65</sup>

Hess’s conception of the spiritual state as the end of history was a rejection of liberalism in the same way as Hegel’s political philosophy was, in so far as the state is seen as the highest form of ‘objective spirit’. The delicate relationship that Hegel had conceived between the state and religion, seen as independent of each other but ultimately stemming from the same source, man’s awareness of the absolute as self-revealing in history, is broken down by Hess, in order to allow the state to become the realm of religious as well as civic activity, an idea that Hegel had held in his youth but later abandoned. Hess’s *Staatsreligion* is clearly influenced by Rousseau and Robespierre but already turns away from the concept of an *être suprême* to the cultivation of the indwelling spirit. For Hess, the state is still the expression of a spirit beyond human nature, guiding and supporting it, while for Bauer atheism implied that the spirit must be identified with the spirit of man and the state become the supreme patron of the many-sided self-development of radically human, unalienated culture.

For Hess the opposition of theist and atheist is meaningless: both abstract atheism and other-worldly religion are destructive of social bonds. The resolution of rationalism and religion is faith in the spirit’s inner-worldly activity, but such faith cannot limit itself to the celebration of the freedom of the individual spirit, the achievement as well as the weakness of idealism. The resolution of conflict must occur in the sphere of action, not be left unresolved simply because Hegel taught that the real is rational and the rational real. Social and political freedom are the clear demands of the age, and Germany can only learn this by witnessing the revolutionary activity of the French. Those who called themselves idealist were often only too ready to abandon an ideal of perfection once it was striven for by conscious action. The reaction of idealism against those who ‘went about with the unheard of idea of bridging the gap between the idea and action’<sup>66</sup> reached its nadir, for Hess, in reactionary Romanticism, eager to send for the police against the ‘utopians’ once its polemics in favour of holy religion had failed. The spirit of evil has taken a new form in modern times: seeing its impotence it transformed itself into a hero of faith, bemoaned the erosion of belief and converted philosophy into the mediator between religion and science. Hess’s parody is aimed at Schelling: the consequence of a reaction against the product of reason – the unity of social and spiritual freedom – becomes a reaction against reason

itself, as Schelling betrays the philosophical ideals of his youth for the compromising security of the chair of philosophy at Berlin as an apologist of Christian romanticism. The return to the bosom of the Church is the fate of all those who refuse to realize the implications of idealism and make utopia a definite task. Those who take up the philosophy of action, who recognize the presence of the spirit within man, are aware of the possibility of perfection in the transformation of the laws of society. The charge that man is naturally egoist fails to appreciate the power of society to bring him to perfection. Up to now society has corrupted man, dominated as it was by the conflict of interests, a conflict necessary to drive man forward. Yet now the possibility of total unity is imminent, a condition in which freedom and order will not conflict but rather relate as form and content. For Hess 'perfection is unity, and human society, in order to achieve its goal, need only unite itself'.<sup>67</sup>

The project of a European triarchy capable of bringing about socio-political freedom is the culmination of the sacred history of mankind. The first work of the sacred history, the Jewish faith and people, has lost all claim to spiritual uniqueness but has continued to play an essential role in European history:

'The Jews had to be there as a goad in the flesh of Western man. Just as the East needed the great wall of China, so as not to be disturbed in its immobile existence, so the Jews are the ferment of Western man called from the beginning to be the archetype of movement.'<sup>68</sup>

Because of this the true indicator of spiritual freedom in any state is the condition of emancipation of the Jews. Like Bauer in his *Die Judenfrage*, Hess sees the true destiny of Judaism in Christianity, which in turn must overcome itself for atheistic humanism (Bauer) or ethical universalism informed by the immanent spirit (Hess). But for Hess the consequence of this is not to postpone the question of political freedom until all men, including the Jews, have rid themselves of the yoke of religion, as Bauer argued, but rather to emphasize the duty of the state to make clear its own freedom from religion by granting the same freedom to all its subjects, regardless of domination.

Hess's first two works, *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit* and *Die Europäische Triarchie*, both point to the urgent tasks of the immediate future as the final stage in salvation history. The blind struggles of man, the unconscious worship of nature, the antagonisms that the spirit of history was forced to use to drive men out of their spiritual myopia are superseded by an awareness of the spirit as a force for harmony that seeks the active, conscious co-operation of man. The dialectic of history has experienced the most bitter conflict in order to

make the restoration of man's primal oneness possible at the highest level of development. The spiritual state, overcoming confessional strife and the social inequality that is already reaching its climax, will make possible the unity that is necessary for human perfection. This can be achieved by the active self-sacrifice of the leading European nations, so that the promise of the ancient Jewish state and pagan republics may be realized – the disappearance of the distinction between religious and civil life, where social oneness becomes an image of God's oneness and social action is felt to be the immediate work of the spirit: 'Europe, just as we see it now, bears the seed of the concrete fulfilment of the Christian idea, the Kingdom of God'.<sup>69</sup>

### b. *The Ethical Deed*

After the publication of the *Europäische Triarchie*, Hess was glad to find work with the newly founded *Rheinische Zeitung*, a journal originally conceived to champion the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie, and, from the point of view of the Prussian government, to provide a loyalist counter-force to the Catholic *Kölnische Zeitung*.<sup>70</sup> Hess himself, however, interpreted his posts as editor and correspondent in Paris as an opportunity to publicize the socialist and communist ideas that were current in France. His journalistic activity made it possible for him to test his earlier reactions to the developing crisis of wealth and poverty by close study of a society more advanced than Germany both in the achievement of political freedom and in industrial development. Hess met the young Karl Marx during his involvement with the *Rheinische Zeitung* and with him attended some of Bruno Bauer's lectures at the university of Bonn.<sup>71</sup> Bauer's atheism and his emphasis on the primacy of the self-consciousness were to exert considerable influence on Hess. The major philosophical product of this period of Hess's activity were the three articles published in 1843 in Georg Herwegh's *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz*: the *Philosophie der Tat*, *Socialismus und Communismus*, and *Die eine und ganze Freiheit* (*Freedom One and Whole*).

The *Philosophie der Tat* concentrates on the principle of free activity already suggested in *Die Europäische Triarchie*, but at the same time eliminates the role of the Holy Spirit for an unconditionally human interpretation of history. Hess begins with an examination of Descartes' fundamental thesis, *cogito ergo sum*. For him the point of Descartes' discovery is not that thought makes us aware of our own existence, of our nature as a conscious being, but rather of our activity, from which no concept of an abstract 'I' can legitimately be abstracted. The static being of the self is as empty as a mathematical point: it becomes



meaningful and observable only in its interaction with an object. To separate the self from its activity and consider it as 'being' is to lapse into the errors of the 'theological consciousness', the fundamental defect of Hegelian philosophy. The meaning of the self can only be grasped as a continuum of acts: its characteristic is to preserve its identity in the midst of its self-transforming other-relating activity. Only by recognizing its nature as free self-determination in a process of change and differentiation can the 'I' escape the fate of being reduced to a phantom by the alienating activity of philosophical reflection: 'Reflection is the Fate who cuts the continuum of the thread of life with the shears of the understanding, interrupting its movement, throttling its vital breath'.<sup>72</sup>

The clear consequence of this is that the individual is the only reality of the Hegelian idea, which is itself in turn only a product of the individual's self-consciousness. The content of the universal idea can be realized only in the process of individuation. The false process of reflection had created the greatest enslaver of mankind in the abstract 'theological' consciousness, that has expressed itself in all the oppressive institutions of history and now allies itself with them. Because of this the achievement of social freedom must be impossible without the eradication of this false consciousness. A Christian, 'theological', communism could only be a monstrosity, since any rejection of present institutions based on spiritual slavery can only mean a return to the Middle Ages. Any break with the established order must be based on a clear insight into the multiple character of this abstract universal: both religion and politics are unreal forms that derive all their means of self-perpetuation from the life of individuals, absorbed and transformed into a system of domination. Religion and the state are Molochs, whose first sacrifice was always real, individual man himself. The absolute spirit permeating the state is merely an imitation of the Christian God, who allows his only son to be crucified and takes pleasure in martyrdom.

Truth slumbers in the institutions of religion and politics — they are anticipations of genuine social unity, originally developed to counteract the barbarity of the state of nature. Their form perfects itself until it reaches the point of absolute domination, religion as Christianity and the state as monarchy, but on reaching this point the dichotomy of untutored individuality and oppressive institutions breaks down, since its dialectic has made possible the development of subjective freedom. Once individuality becomes a genuine possibility, political and religious institutions must be forced to abandon their power for the sake of the truth that was hidden in them. Like Bauer, Hess considers the growth of Christianity a necessary error that would eventually make human freedom possible: the spiritual task of Christianity is not denied

but restricted to a past age of relative barbarity. The details of Hess's interpretation, however, differ from Bauer's: for Bauer Christianity arose as a salvation religion alienated from nature and history in the age of absolute political tyranny, and must eventually be abolished to allow free scope for the enlightened state, fostering the humanist activity of free self-consciousness. Christianity is a form of religion both more universal and more inhuman than the ancient republican religions, as it was also for the young Hegel. For Hess, on the other hand, the religions of the *polis* are of less importance than Judaism, which for Bauer and the young Hegel was a negative influence on Christianity. Hess does not allow for a religion more beautiful or human than Christianity, just as no political form exceeds the rationality of the Hegelian enlightened monarchy. Simply because both are the perfection of the abstract universal, they deny the validity of concrete individuality most acutely. The death of Christianity does not, for Hess, pass into the enlightened rule of the state, but into the unlimited freedom of the individual.

Yet the free individual, the 'spiritual subject', is not yet the fullness of human development — it begins rather to impose its own abstract rule. The anarchic individual rules through the universal rights of man: the French revolution made possible the realization of individual rights, but not yet in a harmonious form. Fearing to develop a new unity out of unwillingness to risk reviving the abstract domination of the *ancien régime*, subjective freedom becomes the rule of arbitrariness, 'it embraces freedom in a frenzy, so that it is suffocated in its embrace'.<sup>73</sup> Unity becomes impossible, as the individual reigns as the atomized 'man', which itself becomes a new form of the dying absolute. The political philosophy of sheer individualism still needs an abstract state to order a society where freedom is understood simply as freedom from restriction — this is the error even of the Young Hegelians, who have overcome all other dualisms but 'still oppose the individual to the universal *qua* state, coming no further than the anarchy of liberalism, to the boundless freedom from which they fall back into the theological state'.<sup>74</sup>

The results of the Revolution were eventually a return to the old forms of domination, but now that, in Germany, the restoration king and Hegel, the philosopher of the restoration, are dead, man can return to the revolution in a more mature way, realizing that the conquest of external restriction is not anarchy but rather self-determination. Hess's aim is to develop a concept of free activity that will be appropriate to a society of self-defining individuals who are capable of spontaneous unity without the intervention of the state, seeing this as a stage beyond both the French revolution and Young Hegelian philosophy. The task of socialism, as it was of idealism in its

first flush or youth, is to 'leave nothing of all the old rubbish behind but free activity'.<sup>75</sup> Freedom must not be content with the spoils of the battles it has already won, never deign to take up a fixed form: the individual must come to know his own nature, the defining limits of his own activity, by overcoming all those limits that the act of abstraction — 'reflection' — has up to now imposed as natural and inevitable. Hess's ideal is an active individualism that is capable of positive ethical achievement while not sacrificing any of its untapped potential to the entrenchment of institutions that it has created as temporary expressions of itself. The thesis that the self can only come to know and possess itself in limitless, fluid activity is for Hess an essential argument against the glorification of material property that the form of individualism unleashed by the French revolution has led to. Property is work frozen into an object and made into a guarantee of the self's existence, an avoidance of the essential task of reaching self-knowledge by the preparedness to sacrifice all the forms of objectification that have hitherto been achieved:

'it is exactly this longing, this urge to continue to exist as a distinct individual, as a rigidly defined ego, as finite being, which leads to the lust for possession . . . material property is the self-consciousness of the spirit become an *idée fixe*.'<sup>76</sup>

For Hess, a conflict between limitless self-defining activity and ethical order did not arise, since once the alienating institutions of religion and the state have been abolished, the individual will become capable of discovering the genuine ethical content of his own character precisely by this activity. Any other source can only re-impose the tyranny of reflection. Hess is eager to deny that he recommends activity free of any differentiation, where all forms disappear into chaos, since this would make nonsense of ethical life. Ethics is the essence of spiritual and social freedom, but it can only be developed out of the individual's self-definition. Because of this the hoped-for reconciliation of German idealism with the political activism of the French revolution cannot take place merely by an artificial conjunction, but be brought forth only by the conscious activity of the Germans themselves. The key form in which this new ethical freedom would express itself is labour: the biblical God had cursed man to work by the sweat of his brow, and all of history had imposed a separation of work and pleasure. Activity that had no end outside itself could change this:

'The first truth which the free Spirit revealed to man was the well-known expression of Spinoza: "Good is what advances activity, what heightens our enjoyment of life". Labour "by the sweat of our brow" has reduced man to wretchedness and slavery; "spontaneous activity" will make him free and happy.'<sup>77</sup>

Once the institutions of reflection, the closed circle of bondage, has been broken out of, man becomes aware of his own potentialities in a totally new way. The historical ages of man, dominated by the dialectic of rude individuality and oppressive universals, during which the talents of man have been developed by conflict, are left behind as the epoch of the 'natural history of the spirit', an age which, properly speaking, should not be called human at all, but rather pre-human, when artificial limits on human activity were accepted as natural and God-given. The age that is to come, that the present dialectical tension will soon produce, will be based on man's knowledge of the world as the sphere of his own self-determination: 'with this knowledge the kingdom of freedom begins, at whose doors we stand and knock'.<sup>78</sup> The ultimate outcome of the philosophy of the deed is the total realization of the achievements of idealism within social relations, the synthesis of a new undogmatic individualism with spontaneous co-operation:

'Now is it the task of the philosophy of the spirit to become philosophy of the deed. Not only thought, but all of human activity, must be elevated to that standpoint where all contradictions are abolished.'<sup>79</sup>

In the essay *Socialismus und Communismus* Hess attempted to analyse the contemporary development of ideas to discern those trends that were capable of shaping the future and to reject those that were unable to escape from the past. He was concerned to discover the hope promised by movements of ideas that were still immature, since to bind oneself to an interpretation of history that ends abruptly in the present is to deny the power of the ethical deed and to commit a form of suicide. Until now, Germany has shown itself to be the most barren field for the development of a philosophy of ethical action, a country constantly suffering from the distinction between politics and religion. But those receptive to the future meaning of the present realize that just because Germany is the country where the spirit has achieved its full development in idealist philosophy, it is only there that man can first take up a form of life that transcends passive reception of the spirit for the self-determination of the deed.

For Hess, the role of the eighteenth century, of Kant and the French Revolution, was to submit religion and the state to the principles of enlightenment, to develop a rational religion and a *Rechtsstaat* out of the medieval and oppressive institutions of the *ancien régime*. Such an attempt pre-supposed that the essence of religion and politics was a necessary part of human nature, if only it could be expressed in rational form. For Hess, by contrast, once the irrational power of the alienating institutions of religion and politics disappears, any attempt to found them on a new rational basis is quite meaningless, since the historical

role of these abstract powers was to contain the passions of man during those epochs when he was incapable of rationality. They are the institutional and ideological partners of irrational man, and must perish in the age of reason and justice.

While Kant and Robespierre pursued the phantoms of supreme being and rational state, the true sources of the future were already being revealed by Fichte and Babeuf. For Hess, the achievement of Fichte was the bold statement of radical atheism. Typically, Fichte's actual ideas are of less importance to Hess than the conceptual niche given to him in Hess's own schema.<sup>80</sup> Babeuf, representing the most radical elements of the French Revolution, rejected all forms of political rule and the concept of the state itself and became 'the first, and consequently crude, form of a unified social life'.<sup>81</sup> Fichte and Babeuf had made the first statement of the principle of the modern age, the absolute unity of all life, but their influence perished because this unity was expressed in an abstract and nihilistic form. The task of the great idealists and the French socialist thinkers was to develop the concrete content of these ideas. The achievement of Hegel and Fourier was to show that the ideals of equality and of freedom were no longer contradictory but that they could be united as aspects of the leading principle of unity. For Hess, their discovery was essential to the meaning of his own *Philosophie der Tat*, which wrestled with the problem of forming equality and freedom into a mutually reinforcing whole. Idealism and utopian socialism made possible for Hess the conclusion that ethical activity was precisely maximally free, self-determined activity, that the chaos of individualism revealed in the working-out of the French Revolution could be overcome once the abolition of the 'rational' state had made possible the ultimate possession of human nature:

'Fourier and Hegel have recognized that there is only one human nature, just as there is only one principle of life: not a good and an evil one, angelic and satanic, virtuous and depraved . . . that all impulses are good, so long as they are not checked by external hindrance or provoked into perversion by reaction; when they can be expressed with perfect freedom and become tangible activity.'<sup>82</sup>

For Hess all human evil, crystallizing around the key vice of egoism, was concentrated into the historical institutions of alienation. His radically historicist understanding of human evil allows for the possibility of its abolition once the dialectic of man's original barbarity and the rule of abstract powers has been overcome. Once Church and state have developed the individual as a 'spiritual subject' their positive role disappears, and their suppression of free individuality becomes the source of evil. The power of original sin extends only as far as the coming time of resolution, the culmination of the modern age. Man himself, once

brought to freedom, is capable of perfection if he can learn to follow his true instincts.

Hess goes on the analyse Lorenz von Stein's *Socialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreichs* (1842), a work written by an agent of the Prussian government intended to make available to the German public knowledge of the doctrines of French socialists and communists as phenomena of an industrializing society that must later arise in Germany. Stein's achievement was to grasp the role of the proletariat as a new class that could not be simply identified with the historically constant 'poor', but which was rather the specific product of industrial capitalism. His work was later praised by Marx as showing awareness of the specific economic forces that had led to the development of socialist and communist thought on behalf of a class that identified revolution with the fulfillment of its own ends.<sup>83</sup>

Hess's reaction was very different: for him Stein had made the crudest beginnings of communist thought the criterion of its mature aims. Stein was correct to see equality as the fundamental inspiration of both socialist and communist thought, the first emphasizing its achievement through the organization of labour, the second through abolition of property by revolution. But the strength of the call for equality in contemporary France, stemming from the French Revolution, did not, for Hess, exclude the other elements of the revolutionary triad. Reacting fearfully to the situation, Stein had failed to see that the search for unity was the deepest current in French life, as it was in Germany. Following its natural bent, France emphasized the foundations of justice in equality, but only as the natural counterpart of freedom. Stein had reduced the French proletariat's search for equality to a desire to share in the same material pleasures as the owners of capital, but for Hess the meaning of communism was precisely to abolish the distinction between work and pleasure, a distinction that was possible only in the conditions imposed by the rule of private, divided property. Communism was not the satisfaction of the needs of a particular group, the product of envy, but rather the fulfillment of ethical principles and the possibility of a new liberation of human nature. The free act of the spirit that Hess saw as the foundation of the future was also a universal, ethical deed, and Hess's understanding of communism was determined by this ethical universality:

'The condition of community is the practical realization of philosophical ethics, which recognizes in free activity the true and unique pleasure, the so-called "highest good" – just as, by contrast, the condition of divided property is the practical realization of egoism and immortality, which on the one hand negates free activity and degrades it to the toil of the slave, and on the other hand substitutes animal pleasure for the highest good of man as the worthy object of this animal toil.'<sup>84</sup>

Hess attempts to develop his own understanding of communism by a critique of the French theorists. Babeuf, whom Stein falsely took as the continuing source of communist aims, had sought an equality of poverty, to be achieved by the abolition of all wealth and culture. For Hess, he was still possessed by the phantom of Rousseau's state of nature: 'The great field of industry was still a *terra incognita* for this communism'.<sup>85</sup> Because of this equality could only be achieved negatively, by the destruction of all pleasures – an imitation of Christian monasticism without the hope of a better future. Even those thinkers who had become aware of the possibilities of the new industrial age continued to separate freedom and equality, St. Simon emphasizing equality, Fourier freedom. Hess restates his conviction that freedom extending to all human activity, not only to work in the economic sense, but to all impulses and inclinations, is the key to equality within community. The meaning of socialism and communism for Hess is not the organisation of labour or of society, but rather the overcoming of all previous forms of social organisation by the purely spontaneous forms that free activity will develop, as each person chooses work suiting his needs. From the multiplicity of individual activity evolves

'the free, not dead and manufactured, but living and eternally youthful organism of free human society, of free human occupations, which at this point cease to be labour but become rather identical with pleasure.'<sup>86</sup>

In comparison with such a society all forms of the state can be distinguished only with difficulty from despotism, since even the democratic state depends on the principle of representation, setting a group of delegates over against the mass of the people. State power is always illusory and whenever it attempts to set itself up as a real power it is overthrown by the people, a process that repeats itself until all the forms of the state have been exhausted and the world of contradictions that it both stemmed from and fostered is overcome by the immediate unity of social life.

In *Die Eine und Ganze Freiheit* Hess re-affirms the unity of social and spiritual liberation, criticizing those who preach of intellectual freedom without daring to bring the torch of enlightenment to the masses. The emphasis of the Young Hegelians on the priority of intellectual freedom and its realization in the rational state is rejected by Hess as an impossibility, since social misery is incapable of any other spiritual reflection than the alienation of religion which, like alcohol and opium, offers release to those for whom free intellectual activity is not even understood as a need. Unlike the Young Hegelians, Hess saw the realization of freedom not in the overcoming of religion by the rational state but in the conquest of state and Church by community:

social and spiritual bondage must be destroyed at a stroke to make independent existence possible. The celebration of free activity overcomes the purely formal distinction between social and spiritual freedom.

Hess notes that German liberalism subordinates social justice to political democracy because the situation of the German proletariat has not yet reached the same straits of misery as that of the English. His answer to this order of priorities reveals the same premisses as his critique of Stein:

‘According to this reasoning it is not the head and the heart but the stomach which determines the truth and the appropriate time for its appearance. We for our part believe, however, that a truth comes at the appropriate time whenever it is recognized, and we do not wish to wait until the hierarchy and the crude force of the industrial barons enslaves the people spiritually and physically, and only then, when it will perhaps be already too late, to take to the field against medieval institutions, against state and Church. We want to expose the inner lie of all religion and politics, as well as the inner connection of spiritual and social freedom.’<sup>87</sup>

The meaning of Hess’s emphasis on the ethical deed capable of spontaneously creating the future becomes clear in this passage: the achievement of freedom depends on ethical insight and will rather than on desperate need brought about by intensifying historical circumstances. For Hess, the development of economic forces might lead beyond the moment when the need of a certain class drove it to take up arms for freedom. Similarly, the desperate physical need of a particular class might be satisfied in ways that had little to do with the achievement of universal freedom. The strength and weakness of his philosophy of social freedom lay in his conviction that ethical insight into the evils of society was possible for the members of any class, and that the abolition of these evils would receive sufficient support from the appeal to ethical feeling.

The *freie Geistestat* (free deed of the spirit) is distinguished from ordinary activity by its freedom from the past and present: it is an act that depends on spiritual insight into the possibilities of the future, which are also the possibilities of universal human nature. In past ages the absence of spiritual freedom made such a conception impossible: to this extent the *freie Geistestat* is limited by history, since it is possible only on the basis of the achievements of philosophy from Spinoza to Hegel. Society could not be transformed until thought became free. But once man’s will becomes conscious of its own creativity, it is freed from the pressure of historical circumstances and can achieve ‘the one and whole freedom’.



The spontaneity of the *Geistestat* makes the evolution of political forms unnecessary. In *Was wir wollen* (What we want), an essay written in Paris in 1843 that extended Hess's discussion of the themes of his work in the *Philosophie der Tat* and the accompanying pieces, Hess emphasized the independence of the ethical deed from the past:

'the beginning of a new reality never proceeds from the so-called "step-by-step" development of an older creation. Every new creation is a leap, it comes from nothing, from the negation of the old conditions. Mediation leads to nothing more than degeneration.'<sup>88</sup>

Nature provides the ground for the free spirit as little as history: nature is the source of limits on human achievement, rather than a model. Freedom can be found nowhere but in self-realizing individuals. The influence of Bauer's thought on these ideas is considerable, but Hess attempts to transcend Bauer's philosophy of free self-consciousness by showing the contradictions in Bauer's thought stemming from his neglect of economics. For Hess, Bauer's thought still bears the marks of the illusory mediations attempted by Hegel. Hegel's neglect of all means for the concrete realization of freedom reaches its peak in Bauer's opposition of the critic and the mass, the clear admission that spiritual freedom has always depended on wealth and privilege and isolates itself in reflection of economic differences. Bauer's elevation of criticism over all practical activity is rejected by Hess, since, he claims, the *praxis* of the free deed is not mere 'external happening', as Bauer had characterized it, the empirical presupposition of the simplest philosophy, but rather action arising out of the self-awareness of freedom that the most developed philosophy can give and which is capable of realizing the content of that philosophy in social life. The last restriction on spiritual freedom is one that Bauer shows no awareness of: the overcoming of Christianity, that Bauer saw as his world-historical task, and the dissolution of the state, the theme dominating Hess's thought after the *Europäische Triarchie*, give way to the attack on material property, 'the last and most external restriction on the freely active spirit'.<sup>89</sup>

From now on the question of economic alienation was to dominate Hess's thought, and socialism, formerly advocated within the context of the *Philosophie der Tat*, became his central concern. The radically individualist theses of the philosophy of the deed, influenced by Bauer's attribution of all creativity to the individual self-consciousness, were challenged by an emphasis on human nature as the model for society, and the good of the species as the criterion of socialism. The conflict of freedom and equality, of individual and society, that Hess had desperately sought to resolve by a maximization of individuality, had

to be restated in a new form once Hess abandoned Bauer's thought as leading to a pernicious distinction between the critical, spiritually free individual and the mass. From the first Hess realized that the emphasis on equality that the economic priorities of socialism would lead to must not destroy the philosophical heritage of freedom:

'the modern age strives with all its might to achieve a union of the individual and the whole, and the problem of our age is none other than the resolution of the contradiction of individual and species, in other words, the restoration of the identity of man with himself, the unity of his species, without harming the plurality of the modes in which the species expresses itself.'<sup>90</sup>

### c. *Socialism and Human Nature*

In early 1843 both the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the *Rheinische Zeitung* were suppressed and any unified influence that the Young Hegelians had possessed disappeared. For Hess, residence in Paris brought increasing involvement with emigré German workers' groups as well as French communists and socialists. His work began to show the influence of Feuerbach, partly transmitted, perhaps, by Marx and Ruge, who were both keen admirers of Feuerbach, and who had hoped to involve him in their project of a joint Franco-German radical publication. Hess's essay *Über das Geldwesen* (*On the Essence of Money*) was his first work to show the direct influence of Feuerbach, and was originally written for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, although not in fact published until 1845. Its argument depended on an application of Feuerbach's theory of religious alienation to the theory and practice of political economy. For Hess, the transformation of the substance of human nature into an other-worldly, repressive object of worship by Christianity had found its modern parallel in money, the alienated expression of human activity.

Hess had begun his discussion in the *Philosophie der Tat* with an emphasis on activity as the true source of individual self-knowledge, in opposition to Descartes. This activity constantly forms relationships with other entities, but its fundamental value for Hess lies in its potential for developing individuality. In *Über das Geldwesen* the emphasis shifts to interaction as the key criterion of human activity and to economics as the decisive sphere of this activity. The individual cannot be understood apart from the context of exchange and intercourse that relates him to others. this relationship makes up the concrete content of each individual's life. Mutual exchange does not proceed from the abstract essence of human nature, but rather, like Hess's earlier category of activity, gives the abstraction 'human nature' all its content.

All human actions are 'species acts', dependent on each individual's unconscious awareness of the range and limits imposed on his own abilities by his membership of the human species.

For Feuerbach, the idea of the supernatural had its origin in the gulf between the possibilities of the individual and those of the species. Humanism consisted in the awareness of the individual's radically unfulfilled character and the acceptance of the species nature of all genuine achievement. The capabilities of the human species were put by Hess in a more strongly historical context than Feuerbach had outlined. Whereas Feuerbach implied that human nature was a treasure of more or less constant value, which must be recaptured from the religious other world, Hess saw it as undergoing development through struggle and conflict in history. Rejecting the belief in an original state of human oneness that he himself had expressed in the *Heilige Geschichte*, Hess now views man's original state as an uncontrolled egoism that provided the fuel for the development of man's productive abilities. The struggle of economic individualism, like the institutions of religion and the state, provided the alienated context for the development of the 'spiritual subject' from barbarity. But like religion and the state, economics reaches a point where it ceases to develop human potential and begins to come into conflict with man in his maturity – only its abolition can make the full self-possession of human capabilities possible:

'Through this struggle we have achieved something quite different from what we hoped and strived to achieve. We believed that we would achieve an external good and we have developed ourselves alone in this process. This illusion was wholesome and beneficial for us only so long as it really contributed to the development of our strengths and abilities. After these abilities are developed, we will only drive ourselves to ruin if we do not adopt communism.'<sup>91</sup>

For Hess, contemporary overproduction must give way to a new breakthrough in human nature itself. Unity inspired by love and reason will make possible man's escape from his own natural history, from the historical world of conflict and dialectical development, to the kingdom of freedom, the supra-historical state characterized by the full development of human capabilities.

Like Hegel, Hess believed in the possibility of a culmination of human development that would make further fundamental conflict unnecessary. But whereas for Hegel the post-revolutionary *Rechtsstaat* involved an acceptance of the impossibility of reviving the ancient *polis*, and all absolute values were to be realized only within the spheres of art, religion and philosophy, for Hess the essential meaning of social transformation was the realization of philosophy and the rejection of any form of spiritual experience or of freedom of consciousness that

could not take up a concrete role as an aspect of the perfection of human relations. While abandoning his belief in the innocence of Rousseau's 'state of nature', Hess hoped for the 'higher innocence' of a future resolution of historical conflict.

In a world where the economic preconditions for universal wealth were already present, economic individualism had denied the human species by elevating money to the status of an abstract power. Just as Christianity had ignored the real world of political and social freedom, becoming a 'logic of egoism' that was concerned only with the eternal life of the individual, so money expressed the indifference of economic egoism to communal life and human misery. For both Feuerbach and Bauer, Christianity had in practice limited its doctrine of universal love to those who believed. In the same way, for Hess, 'the modern mercenary world' judged man according to his goods, reducing the value of the human personality to exchange value. The universality of money had made it the essential mediator for all human relationships, exceeding the power that even religion had to divert human attention away from mutual intercourse towards interiorized worship:

'When every prompting of the heart must be given a cash-value in order to come to life, then the divine spirits walk once again on earth, the dehumanization of man takes place within the world itself. The "bliss" of the heavenly beyond becomes earthly "happiness", theoretical egoism becomes practical – the mere fact of real slavery is elevated to a principle and rigorously applied.'<sup>92</sup>

The proclamation of the rights of man had also been the proclamation of the anonymous society: the separation of the state and civil society was mirrored by the split of the human individual, the *Gattungsmensch*, into a sacred, romanticized personality in private life and a precisely evaluated item of property in public life. With the community of goods and mutual co-operation impossible, the well-springs of the personality in the species dry up, and the bare, featureless ego can engage only in self-selling or other-buying, submission or domination. The final conclusion of the logic of money is the total extinction of human feeling, the erection of an idol more powerful than any social class. The ultimate cruelty of the Moloch of religion had been to sacrifice the God-man to itself and consume his flesh and blood. In the same way money becomes the medium of plunder in a world of beasts of prey:

'money is the sweated blood of the wretched poor, who bring what is inalienably their own, their most personal property, their vital activity itself, to the market, in order to exchange it for a so-called "capital", its *caput mortuum*, and thus cannibalize their own flesh . . . Yes, we must constantly alienate our own being, our life, our own free, vital activity in order to eke out our wretched existence.'<sup>92</sup>

After his involvement in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Hess devoted himself to the development and propagation of his socialist theories. In a series of essays he attempted to show that socialism would be capable of resolving the riddle of history and of fulfilling human nature. He extended his critique of contemporary philosophy at the same time. His polemical and theoretical essays were complemented by the journals he edited, notably the *Gesellschaftsspiegel* (*Mirror of Society*), intended to develop awareness of the social problems caused by the growth of industrial capitalism and to depict the situation of the propertyless classes. His public espousal of socialism reached its peak in meetings at Elberfeld, where, in collaboration with his disciple Friedrich Engels, he spoke to a largely middle-class audience with some temporary success.

For Hess the importance and necessity of socialism lay in its role as the form of social life most suited to realize human nature. Feuerbach's critique of theology depended on the demonstration that there existed in man a definable nature or essence, a property of the whole species rather than of any individual and realizable only by the unified powers of the species. Theology had transformed this essence into a divine object, making impossible for man a true awareness of his own capabilities and enslaving him to an alien power. If it could be shown that money had taken over the role of theology, then socialism, by abolishing the possibility of economic alienation, would become the active realization of the human essence. If, for Feuerbach, the true content of theology was anthropology, then for Hess socialism was the realized content of anthropology. Yet Hess's use of Feuerbach's concepts was constantly influenced by conflicting elements of his own thought. The idea of a *Gattungswesen*, a human essence that was constant and universal and that could be fulfilled by the destruction of alienation at any stage of history, clashed with the understanding of human nature as the continually evolving product of struggle and conflict that Hess had developed in his earlier works. If human nature had been created by undergoing a necessary system of alienations in religion, the state, and the rule of money, then it could not be spoken of as eternal and normative but only as the contemporary resolution of historical forces. Further, if historical change was a necessary process, then an ethical appeal to all classes of society was useless and irrelevant.

At the same time Hess's avowal of socialism derived great moral force by basing itself on human nature, conceived as an ethical universal. By rejecting the description of socialism as the satisfaction of the wants and needs of the proletariat alone, by making its value the object of the ethical insight of any man not overcome by egoism, Hess was able to preserve the value of the spontaneous ethical deed. The under

standing of socialism as the free realization of universal human nature and the contrasting insight into its necessity as the culmination of human development are ideas held together in tension in Hess's thought, resolved only by his conception of the uniqueness of socialism as the *final* resolution of the antagonisms of history. Human nature has been historically formed, and cannot be thought of as rediscoverable in any period of history — yet the crucial significance of the modern age and of the development of industry (a phenomenon whose importance in making possible a new fullness of human nature had been remarked on by Hess already in the *Heilige Geschichte*) was that it witnessed the last and most profound stage of alienation, whose abolition would mark the end of man's embryonic growth and the beginning of free creativity. For Hess, ethical appeal and condemnation becomes uniquely relevant in the modern age because the historical conditions for the achievement of freedom have been fulfilled and the institutions of alienation have ceased to play any constructive part. Because of this, egoism becomes a 'formal' vice which can be fought by purely abstract, ethical condemnation. Even in his early works, Hess did not place all the burden of history upon the divine spirit, but emphasized the active and conscious participation of man.<sup>94</sup>

For Hess, socialism is not only a moral concept arbitrarily imposed on history but an attempt to answer the challenge posed by the present tension of historical forces with a deeper wisdom than economic individualism. This wisdom is accessible to all who study history and its task is to resolve rather than to exacerbate conflict, without, however, accepting any false mediations, any system of contradictions reminiscent, for Hess, of Proudhon:

'Our task is not to convert the world. A theory has never converted the world if the world, life itself, had not produced the theory. Our task is only to develop the knowledge that any one educated enough to be able to read the book of history will discover for himself — to develop this knowledge so that we do not helplessly go to our ruin on the day when only this knowledge can save us.'<sup>95</sup>

The basis of communism is in the enormous development of productive forces that has made possible an abundant life for all, but its creation is an act independent of specific historical forces, neither inevitable nor necessarily the result of revolution. The power of history is allied to moral need, but cannot be identified with any particular group. Already in the *Europäische Triarchie* Hess had criticized Hegel for failing to discern the presence of spontaneous, self-conscious action in the past, but in the present age, now that man has achieved greater spiritual freedom, the role of the free ethical deed is of crucial importance. History poses the possibility of a higher harmony, but only action working

from ethical conviction can achieve it, and it will be powerful enough to do so since only formal obstacles oppose the achievement of communism. The material for organization of society has already been developed by the growth of industry. Man's present task is to perceive that his own destiny is the 'many sided development of his species-life', which can only take place in a society organized on communal principles.

Hess's concept of capitalism, the product of economic individualism, is determined by the same premisses as his critique of money. The rapidly growing industrial forces have become a 'sword in the hand of a child', out of all human control and leading civilization towards destruction through the dissolution of all human ties.<sup>96</sup> The most important result of communism would be to re-appropriate economic substance by subjecting it to the control of man in community. Hess remarks on the strangeness of the fact that the development of human powers has made man himself more and more helpless, by subjecting him to his own creations.<sup>97</sup> The development of economic forces has led to the 'contradiction of constantly increasing economic traffic side-by-side with human isolation'.<sup>98</sup> Man's livelihood now depends on the functioning of an economic system that is rapidly conquering the world, on a complex and delicate web of interrelationships, but he has only his own individual strength to satisfy his needs within this system. The intercourse of man with man takes place only under the aegis of money and his individual personality retreats further and further away from the stage of human relations in the market place:

'The mercenary world is the practical form of the world of lies and illusion. Under the appearance of absolute independence lies absolute need; under the appearance of the most lively intercourse lies the most deathly repulsion of man from all his fellow men.'<sup>99</sup>

Communal property will make economics the tool of man, an element in his self-development: the aim of economic transformation is not to abolish truly private property, property that is intimately involved with an individual's own activity, but that property that has grown out of all relationship to human needs and control. Privately owned capital is possessed in a superficial, external way, while communal ownership offers security of material and spiritual life by subjecting money to the needs of the group.<sup>100</sup> The false universality that capitalism offers, involving all in relationships of submission and domination, the 'opposition of the private man and the externalized common essence'<sup>101</sup> can be overcome only by the re-appropriation of the human product:

'money should be a social possession, intimately bound up with man's self, a material serving him in his social activity: as such it would be as inalienable as anything else that man possesses as the means or material for his vital activity, such as his own body, or his education.'<sup>102</sup>

If free competition is the highest historical form, the last word of egoism, then it is clear that the pursuit of egoism can from now on lead only away from the capabilities man has already achieved. In all of history egoism and community have clashed, and the educative work of society was necessary to break down the natural egoism of man.<sup>103</sup> The realization that egoism can no longer activate economic progress, that the capitalist system is leading to crises of overproduction and unemployment, is the final sign that the role of egoism in fuelling the historical dialectic is over. Socialism is the result of all of history as well as a new freedom from the pressure of history. It is the key to the modern age, which is itself the historic age of decision: 'the socialist movements are the stirrings of the human spirit, springing into life in the womb of the age'.<sup>104</sup>

Hess's most subtle treatment of the problem of the relationship between freedom and equality in socialism was in his critique of Proudhon's *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* For Hess, Proudhon was wrong to consider freedom and equality as in some way opposed. The unity of freedom and equality could be achieved by constantly reworking the achievements of the French Revolution, forced by reaction into misshapen form. Equality is the key to freedom because it makes possible the full development of each person's abilities by providing all with the material means of self-realization. The urge to equality characteristic of the contemporary epoch was a sign of its creative character: the levelling destruction with which reaction reproached the age was a phantom reflecting only its own impotence. The disturbances of modern times were great because the creation of a transformed society would be an unparalleled task – only thorough-going upheaval could bring forth a new organism. The influence of Bauer's negative *Kritik* and of the Biblical theme of salvation through suffering is clear in Hess's conviction that history achieves higher forms only through the resolution of conflict. The struggle for equality destroys the systems inherited from the past, but the freedom for development that it makes possible by the abolition of destitution among the masses encourages the creation of a new culture:

'Freedom follows on the footsteps of equality, but it is this latter which is the revolutionary, destructive, negative and critical element, while freedom, in contrast, is organic, creative, positive, conservative. Freedom is life, equality death. Yet this death is the necessary condition of new life, the transition to it . . . the French revolution is a living process of history, but a death-sentence on the past, on existing conditions.'<sup>105</sup>



The two sources of socialism are German philosophy, which was finally capable of understanding man as a *Gattungswesen*, and the 'practical want of the proletariat'. For Hess it was the proletariat that provided substance to the socialist movement, but for him their commitment cannot be interpreted only as the product of their immediate needs: he attempts to preserve ethical universality by seeing the proletariat as a class still inspired by humanism, capable through its misery of seeing the true resolution of the new economy in community, uncorrupted by the power of egoism. The proletariat's historical role involves clear ethical insight, reinforced by need, and as such can be shared by a member of any other class capable of ethical response:

'certainly, in France it is only the proletariat which takes part in the movement of our time, but this is not because they are more egoistic — it is because they are more influenced by humanity that the mercenary, haggling and corrupt world of money.'<sup>106</sup>

The support of the best minds in Germany is essential for socialism, since socialism attempts to fulfil the spiritual categories developed by idealism, and the concepts of self-consciousness and species-being developed by the Young Hegelians. In France, it is the proletariat that must play a humanizing role in relation to an intelligentsia that is still trapped within the illusory worlds of religion and romanticism, whereas in Germany an intelligentsia that has freed itself from alienating illusions must begin to convert all social classes. The French proletariat's natural humanism brings it to the same insights that German free-thinkers have achieved through education.<sup>107</sup>

To the two groups capable of realizing practical humanism correspond two human faculties, science and feeling. In his speech to the worthies of Elberfeld Hess emphasized that it is 'our heart, our fellow feeling for the spiritual and physical wretchedness of our neighbour, which motivates us to the idea of communism and its development'.<sup>108</sup> The ethical deed that can help man to escape the world of conflict is concretely inspired by a situation of human misery. But its spiritual character also involves insight into the true state of the world, the need to discern the possibilities of transformation latent within the creative but alienating forms of the world of man's pre-history. The role of the intellect, capable of universalizing feeling and satisfying its demand for change, 'the heart that has achieved understanding', is neglected only at the risk of exposing the socialist cause to mystical word-spinners.<sup>109</sup> Hess's contact with emigré German workers in Paris had made him aware how much the immaturity of Germany's political situation and the rapid intensification of economic pressure could lead to social despair and the loss of a clear understanding of reality.

Rational hope for change could be revived only by a thoughtful awareness of the historical situation of the proletariat in alliance with the most progressive representatives of philosophical humanism: 'Socialism is not only the highest religion, it is also the highest form of science: socialists must indeed be apostles, but also philosophers, in order to achieve their goal'.<sup>110</sup> But Hess realized that such rational hope was only possible once economic change had produced a sufficiently large and class-conscious proletariat. The one-sidedness of German socialism, its naive evangelizing, typified by Weitling, was the product of 'a defective, sickly social organism' and could not be reformed until society itself was ready for change:

'the German worker may despair of putting into practice the ideas that he recognizes to be correct. He sees a gulf between the idea and its realization, a gulf which can be bridged only a miracle, and which the English and French worker does not see, because he stands in this gulf, filling it with the mass of his fellow sufferers. It does not occur to the French *ouvrier* or the English factory worker to doubt the possibility of executing a social reform once he has adopted the idea of it, since he knows that he himself is the executive power of modern history.'<sup>111</sup>

The sources of Hess's socialist convictions were in the vision of human perfection through the work of the spirit that he had developed in his youth and had expressed in his first literary attempts. His writings are full of evocations of a future utopia and rejection of limits to the potential of human nature. For Hess, it is the belief in such limits that has hurt man most. The rejection of economic individualism is also a rejection of man as necessarily imperfect:

'We are supposed to believe that every man should think only of himself, since God cares for all of us, that is, we are not supposed to take the voice of our conscience to heart and to pay God and our fellow man off with prayers and alms . . . Gentlemen, do not believe in this base dogma of the imperfection of all things on earth — it is the dogma of our shame, the dogma of our subjection, the dogma of our smugness.'<sup>112</sup>

Hess's social philosophy consciously proposed the end of what has always been thought of as human nature, which was for him only a long preparation for genuine human activity. Yet his utopianism was matched by a well-developed attention to contemporary reality and was free of all fanaticism: his concrete proposals for social change demonstrated his awareness of the limits of possibility and his advocacy of socialism as an ethical doctrine allowed for the possibility of social transformation without the intensification of violence or class conflict. His elaboration of utopia played the role of a critique of contemporary misery and an inspiration to future possibilities without attempting to impose its own content on reality.

In his *Kommunistisches Glaubensbekenntniss in Fragen und Antworten* (*Communist Confession of Faith in Question and Answer*) (1844) and later in *Die Folgen einer Revolution des Proletariats* (*The Consequences of a Proletarian Revolution*) (1847) Hess enunciated the concrete proposals that for him would begin the transition to socialism: progressive income tax, partial or complete elimination of inheritance through death duties, free universal education, the establishment of national workshops to guarantee employment, nationalization of feudal lands and the development of publicly owned industry. The role of these measures would be to lay the foundations for a future communist society. Hess stressed the impossibility of abolishing egoism by decree and the futility of destroying the basis of egoistic production before communal production had been able to develop itself. For Hess the fundamental force for change, the secret to the new type of human being capable of living in a communal society, was the universal education that would be made possible by the re-distribution of wealth. Institutional change was subordinated in his thought to the fostering of a transformation of social relations, related to Hess's emphasis on the ethical basis of all social activity:

'we must bring a new generation to educated adulthood through universal and free education, but our immediate task is to relieve the need of the old generation through the immediate foundation of national workshops, which gradually, through the development of the new generation, will take on a more noble character, becoming at length free, human associations of labour in the broadest sense.'<sup>113</sup>

As Cieszkowski recognized in his *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, the positive role of utopian thought is rarely to transform society in its own image, but rather to help create a new spiritual climate which may in turn begin to have a transforming effect on the material reality of society. Hess's thought was intensely utopian, and for him socialism was explicitly intended to play the role of religion, but his understanding of the process of social change showed an awareness of the limits that reality imposed on the implementation of a communal ideal. His confidence in the potential of a future transformation of human nature, of liberation from historical conflict, could not be based on any sort of evidence, precisely because it projected a state radically unlike anything in history. It must be considered a secularized form of religious faith, yet one that Hess was capable of expressing through practical and realistic judgements on contemporary reality.<sup>114</sup>

Hess's development of socialism as the highest form of practical-ethical activity was made in conscious rejection of the Young Hegelians, although he distinguished sharply between the constructive but insufficient humanism of Feuerbach and Ruge and what he saw as the

pernicious individualism of Bauer and Stirner. Feuerbach's inability to transcend his critique of religion for a critique of society, to develop a foundation for practical freedom, was for Hess imitated by Ruge, who was capable of active critique of despotism but could not begin to criticize the state itself. Ruge, who saw socialist thought as an unphilosophic concern for economic facts,<sup>115</sup> made the mistake of thinking that a political revolution could reform the injustices in society, not realizing that the existence of the state was based on the distinction between bourgeois and citizen, on the anarchy of individualism. His exclusive concern with the state led to blindness to the true sources of social life in economics, just as Robespierre sought to control economic life by an imposition of the virtues of the classical republican state.<sup>116</sup>

In *Die letzten Philosophen* (1845) Hess attempted to make a final judgement of Bauer and Stirner. For Hess, Bauer's philosophical humanism was as much of an attack on humanity as religion had been. Bauer's *Kritik*, dismissing the world of non-philosophers as the 'mass', leaves the social world open to the ravages of practical egoism. By rejecting the struggle of mass humanity to transform its own life, Bauer rejects humanism itself. Stirner, on the other hand, is practical egoism become fully self-conscious and made an ideal. His thought is the culmination of philosophy's inability to go beyond the category of *an und für sich Sein*, the fully self-conscious individual, to *Füreinandersein*, the social man who realizes that all his abilities and particularities receive their content only through social co-operation. Stirner recapitulates all the historical forms of egoism, that have reached their *apogée* in the bourgeois-Christian world, but is ultimately unable to live up to his ideal of pure anarchy since he retains a normative concept of individualism. Hess failed to notice that Stirner's emphasis on the individual as the only reality of all religious and philosophical ideas, and his critique of humanism as a new form of the oppressive universal, corresponded to the fundamental theme of his own *Philosophie der Tat*, where he himself had attempted to derive both freedom and equality from pure individual activity, rejecting any sort of universalist norm.<sup>117</sup>

#### d. Hess and Historical Materialism

From his first meeting with Marx Hess had been profoundly impressed by his talents and had made an uncannily accurate prediction of his significance in the history of thought, fully aware of his own comparative amateurishness. It is difficult to estimate the influence of Marx's ideas on Hess before Hess's publication of *Die Folgen einer Revolution des*

Proletariats (1847), but his co-operation with Marx and Engels in the writing of *Die deutsche Ideologie* and his frequent contact with them meant that Hess must have been well aware of the trend of their ideas. Some passages of his works in 1844 and 1845 show an awareness of the priorities of historical materialism, although they remain subordinated to the categories of ethical or 'true' socialism.<sup>118</sup>

In *Die Folgen einer Revolution des Proletariats*, however, Hess rejected the fundamentals of ethical socialism and embraced Marx's interpretation. Hess now affirmed that the coming of revolution will be determined by the simple rules of the socio-economic situation, not by any ethical priorities. The principal actor in this revolution will be the proletariat, acting out of immediate concern for its own needs:

'A proletarian revolution presupposes above all a proletariat – a struggle which concerns not merely abstract principles, but palpable and concrete interests, the threatened existence of the whole working class – such a struggle presupposes that the existence of the great majority of the workers is already collectively threatened, that these workers know which enemy they are fighting, and finally that they have the means to vanquish them in their grasp.'<sup>119</sup>

The possibility of revolution arises only when the processes of industrial capitalism have reached the point where a large proletariat is created, whose wages have been reduced to the lowest possible level. A proletarian revolution would seize the already developed means of production and turn them to its own use: Hess had seemingly abandoned the conviction that led him to speak of socialism to the entrepreneurs of Elberfeld. Philanthropic feeling will be incapable of overcoming the egoism of the owning class and the proletariat must appropriate the capital necessary to set up communal industry by force.

Such a revolution is likely to take place only in England, since only there is there sufficient development of the new productive forces and the social situation that has been created by them. But the economic influence of Britain is so great that the chaos created by revolution there will soon spread throughout Europe, making way for an international union of democratic states. The basic achievement of a proletarian revolution, in full union with other democratic parties, will be to found democracy. The immediate socialization of industry will not be possible, since only the proletariat would wish it, but the realization of the demands of radical democracy – free, universal education, progressive income tax and death duties – will prepare the basis for future communal economy. The task of the state will not be to set itself up in competition with private industry, but rather to apply measures to gradually deprive it of capital and to encourage a new generation to take part in the development of social industry.

Hess goes on to adopt Marx's critique of ideology as a rebuttal of the bourgeois accusation that communism is a set of ideas designed to suppress the values of the individual personality. As an expression of the interests of a particular class, communism has nothing more to do with abstract and universal ideas than the bourgeois ideal of personality itself, which is equally the ideological expression of the bourgeoisie's struggle with feudalism.

Yet, at the end of his series of articles on proletarian revolution, Hess departs from historical materialism and from Marx's political emphases to deny the bourgeoisie any fruitful role in the coming revolution. The split of bourgeois democrats and socialists, exemplified by the break of Hess and Marx with Ruge, demonstrates for Hess the lack of political will typical of the German bourgeoisie. Although accepting Marx's concentration on the proletariat as the only class capable of overcoming capitalism, Hess denies that the role of the bourgeoisie in establishing industrial capitalism will be sufficient guarantee of its ability to make a democratic revolution. The idealist emphasis on ethical preparedness for political action that characterized his earlier works was developed with the political backwardness of the German bourgeoisie in mind, and it is maintained here. In 1842 Hess had written to his friend Auerbach:

'No organ of the body of the German fatherland remains healthy; everything is decayed, nerveless and perverted – I mean with respect to political and social life. But for the little private virtue that remains and for German philosophy, Germany would be lost for ever. Germany's future must develop out of family life and philosophy. What we need above all is education – genuine, practical, political education.'<sup>120</sup>

For Hess, German philosophy had not been transformed into a state of readiness for the spontaneous ethical deed by the bourgeoisie, but rather found its fulfilment in socialism, which holds out the possibility of the resolution of all historical conflicts. Whatever the bourgeoisie's role in socio-economic history, its political future is outside its own control:

'Incapable of existing and developing itself under the regime of the All-highest, yet too weak and cowardly to unite itself with the mass of the people subordinate to it in the cause of revolution, the German bourgeoisie seems damned to be washed to and fro between fear and hope on the still ocean of German misere, until the storm from the West breaks and the waves of the proletariat, foaming out of the deep, crash down on monarchy, nobility and bourgeoisie.'<sup>121</sup>

The revolution of 1848 and the ensuing political reaction marked the end of the age when philosophy and revolutionary social thought had developed in close relationship. The intensity of social polarization and

the apparent imminence of upheaval in the years before 1848 had fostered an optimistic and utopian vitality in the work of the Young Hegelians as well as those of Hess and Marx. For Marx, political reaction meant exile to England and the decades-long elaboration of the theses of historical materialism. For Hess, exclusive involvement in philosophy and socialist activity gave way to developing interests in the natural sciences and to a revived concern for the fate of his own people of Israel, which bore fruit in *Rom und Jerusalem*, a combination of socialist and Zionist ideas. He eventually took part in the foundation of the German Social Democratic party and always remained a supporter of Marx's ideas in the affairs of the Socialist International. Soon after the collapse of the revolution, however, he did produce two works which continued to develop the themes that had been initiated in the *Heilige Geschichte der Menschheit*. These were his *Briefe an Iscander* (*Letters to Iscander*) (the pseudonym of Alexander Herzen), 1850, and the *Jugement Dernier du Vieux Monde Social* (*A Last Judgement on the Old Social World*), 1851.

Herzen, the Russian emigre who had come to Europe to find freedom, had expressed his despair at the failure of the 1848 revolution in his *From the Other Shore* (1850), in which he accused the radicals of a naive utopianism. Herzen's disillusionment with the European revolution led him to put his faith in a restoration of European civilization through Russian intervention and the influence of the spiritual values of the Russian peasant as expressed in the commune. For Hess, Herzen's pessimism concerning the radical movement stemmed from his failure to understand communism as a concrete expression of an oppressed class. To see communism as a type of ideology, as a 'utopia', is to expose it to the ideological attacks of the bourgeoisie, who accuse it of suppressing freedom and personality.<sup>122</sup> Hess's case is based on his understanding of Marx, but his own adaptation of Marx's ideas restores the ethical emphasis of his earlier works. For Hess, the 'religious' character of radical social thought, which Herzen had criticized, is a genuine product of its immersion in the concrete struggles of men and women engaged in productive work:

'Whoever stands in the midst of these things, like the working people, or who spiritually immerses himself in them, as their apostles do, does not merely grasp the philosophy of his age: it puts its stamp on his whole life. This is religion, if you like; in any case, it is the fullness of life.'<sup>123</sup>

As apostle of the gospel of social transformation the socialist must consider himself more closely related to the apostles of all ages than the philosophers, even though he has long ago rejected both the Christian and the Robespierrian God. The apostle realizes that ideology is

remote from the reality of social life, that the content of man's historical struggles can never be fully expressed by any philosophy. The apostles of past ages saw confusedly not because they immersed themselves in social life, but because this life itself was ridden with contradiction. Since the present age is on the threshold of passing over from the world of antagonism to the final resolution, the apostolic role becomes crucial, since only those who have nothing material or spiritual to lose, who have totally immersed themselves in and identified with the movement of history, can embrace the death of present society. The tension between the progress of the Holy Spirit in history and the efficacy of the spontaneous ethical deed takes a new form in Hess's attempt to mold historical materialism to his own continuing convictions: the ethical action of the apostle is no longer as spontaneous as the individual described in the *Philosophie der Tat*, but rather revives the willing identification with the work of the spirit in history that characterized Hess's first works. Historical materialism means that the human will cannot change history any more than nature, but that, once its laws are perceived and identified with, the will can gratefully involve itself in the working out of these laws, in the mood characteristic of the apostles and martyrs of the Christian past: 'Enthusiasm, if you like, yes, but an enthusiasm justified by history and motivated by life'.<sup>124</sup> Such identification with the salvific task of history is impossible for the philosopher, who seeks to discover an abstract truth in every age, denying history's role as the realization of truth:

'The philosopher can foresee the death of the old society, but neither wish it nor help to bring it about, since its death is also his own death. He lives only in the present and not in the past and future: the past for him is dead and gone and the future only a utopia. He loves "intellectual achievement" more than the real revolutionary movement, since he believes that he has privately won the "truth" for himself, an abstract "spiritual" capital, which he holds as his spiritual private property.'<sup>125</sup>

Hess's answer to Herzen's Slavophile solution to the collapse of the European revolution accepted the possibility that the antagonism of European history might not be resolved in a higher harmony, that the coming revolutionary collapse of society might be 'a death without resurrection', but he was certain that a higher stage of European civilization could not come through intervention by a less civilized people. The central themes of the *Europäische Triarchie*, situating the seed of the future in the progressive forces of the most developed European nations, are reiterated. Europe is incapable of freedom unless it liberates itself, coming to terms with the potential hidden in its present conflicts. Forces outside the dialectic of European history in its most advanced form can offer no solution: 'I do not deny the possibility of



the victory of barbarism . . . what is impossible is that the revolution will achieve its goal by means that contradict its goal'.<sup>126</sup>

Hess began his *Jugement Dernier du Vieux Monde Social* by attempting to show that the school of socialists led by Marx had achieved an insight into social reality that overcame the limitations shared by Feuerbach and Proudhon, who, like Moses, were both able to see into the promised land without having the power to reach it. They had shown how the material and spiritual activity of man were alienated to God and to the capitalist, but neither could show how to regain this living essence. Proudhon's plan to make capital available to all by free credit, and Feuerbach's hope that a new human consciousness would restore man's strength to him, shared the illusion that genuine humanity could be made possible without a revolutionary overcoming of contemporary institutions and of philosophy itself. Marx's insights had fulfilled the promise of Feuerbach and Proudhon, had subjected European society to a searching and realistic critique, but in doing so had lost the spontaneity essential to revolutionary activity. Hess's acceptance of historical materialism was limited by his conviction that it restored the supremacy of purely theoretical activity that the critique of Hegel had challenged. He was aware that Marx's comprehension of economic and social reality involved a return to the Hegelian interpretation of history as outside conscious human control, and a rejection of the role of ethical activism that was similar to Hegel's. The Marxists

'have an excellent command of the skill of dissecting the body of our society, of setting forth its economy and diagnosing its disease. But they are too materialistic to have the impetus that will electrify and move the people. Having abandoned idealist philosophy, they throw themselves into the arms of materialist economics.'<sup>127</sup>

For Hess, the failure of the revolution of 1848 did not mean that revolution itself would have to be postponed to an indefinite future. For him the contradictions of capitalism were already sufficiently intense to make revolution a constant possibility. The meaning of revolution is elaborated by Hess in fundamentally the same categories as in his works before 1848: the role of antagonism in the dialectical development of man, the possibility of a resolution of this antagonism in a harmony qualitatively different from previous history, the full development of human capacities in the communal control of the means of production already developed by capitalism and the need for an overcoming of egoism if the newly acquired means of production were not to be wasted. Since the socio-economic conditions for the establishment of socialism already exist, only an act of will is needed to bring

it about. His use of historical materialism plays the same role as the idealist historicism of his early works, and is related to ethical demands in the same way. The work of history has prepared the concrete basis for the fulfilment of the ethical ideals that man is aware of in all ages but can only achieve after the dialectic of the spirit or the development of economic forces have done their work:

'Today the only mode of accumulation that can accord with the height of our productive forces, and which is appropriate to our material and intellectual means, to our needs and to our ideas, is the centralisation of all productive forces in the association of all for the benefit of all. This communist unification, which was materially and morally impossible in the past, is today an absolute necessity.'<sup>128</sup>

Hess's revolutionary expectations were as strong in this work as in the *Europäische Triarchie*. Like the original French revolution, the February revolution of 1848 was only a ripple on the surface of history: the true revolution is yet to come, and will be recognized by its total character. Marx's acceptance of the remoteness of revolution after 1848 was not shared by Hess, because his understanding of the economic processes that Marx had characterized was still subordinated to the apocalyptic themes that were continuous with his early works. The present age remained for Hess the prelude to the decisive break with the past:

'The catastrophe . . . will be something similar to what is called the "last judgement" in the Gospels . . . We stand in the twilight before this last battle, which will decide the destiny of the world.'<sup>129</sup>

The crucial difference in Hess's *Jugement Dernier* from the works preceding 1848 is its ambivalence about the ability of European civilization to renew itself. Previously Hess had accepted that the historical dialectic of antagonism held a definite promise of higher reconciliation, and Marx's work would attempt to show that this hope was not merely ideological but grounded in the most searching analyses of material reality. Now Hess posed the question whether the conflicting forces of history necessarily imply a harmonious resolution, since the power of egoism may have fatally corrupted the human race so that institutional liberation will not be sufficient to produce a new humanity. The death of the present system was certain, since it had outlived its capacity for renewal. If the dualism of the past had not destroyed the unified will of man, if there was a people in Europe capable of preserving its own unity, then that people could save Europe at the collapse of its old institutions by creating new social patterns. Both historical materialism and Hess's idealist historicism assumed that freedom

would issue spontaneously from the overcoming of the last stage of European 'pre-history' – capitalism – but for Hess, in contrast to Marx, it can be asked whether the abuse of human relationships and rank exercise of egosim in the past makes problematic a conversion to freedom based on an objective overcoming of conflict. The ethical nature of man must also revive after its millenia of abuse, and its preservation must remain the fundamental task of social utopia:

'If we . . . have become so intertwined with our own institutions that we have no other motivation than egoism; if today the peoples, humanity, the creators of all social institutions in Europe, were as corrupt as their works; if the soul of our social body, European man, were as decayed as its body – then, no doubt, the death of Europe would be a moral death, a death without resurrection.'<sup>130</sup>

During the 1840's Hess's thought developed under many influences. The French socialists drew his attention to problems which had had little effect on Germany but which clearly would determine its future. Cieszkowski's emphasis on *praxis* creative of the future was used by Hess to formulate his own notion of the ethical *Geistestat*. Bauer and Feuerbach led him to equate human liberation with atheism, and Marx's thought impressed on him the need to base socialist aspirations in a painstaking analysis of material reality.

What was fundamental to his own thought was the idea of the ethical kingdom of man inspired by the immanent spirit of history. His subsequent return to the Jewish faith, expressed in *Rom und Jerusalem*, demonstrated that the atheism which he had professed during the 1840's was but a temporary expression of his desire to relate religion as closely as possible to the concrete moral and physical sufferings of humanity. What led him to accept and to propagate the atheism of the Young Hegelians was a conviction that the true content of religion was to be found only in the ethical realm that man could build on earth by co-operative effort. His own ardent utopianism, reinforced by the strength of his compassion for the social misery that he so willingly immersed himself in, convinced him that the new Zion which was the guiding star of his original Jewish faith was historically imminent. His disposition to interpret the content of religion in terms of a future Kingdom of God on earth fused with the Young Hegelians' critique of religious alienation in his conviction that only atheism could give man the dedication and self-confidence necessary for the final resolution of the antagonisms of history. If, as the Young Hegelians professed, religion had completely outlived its ancient usefulness and persisted only to distract man from his own possibilities, then, for Hess, the ethical heart of the Biblical faith could only be realized in social action which had abandoned all piety towards the other-worldly just as it hoped for the destruction of all the corrupt institutions of the past.

Yet Hess's insistence on the purpose of radical social action as the restoration of man's ethical nature retained even in the 1840's an awareness of the overarching and protective force of the divine spirit. The various transformations that his thought was subjected to never totally obscured the vision of man as a historical agent guided towards its destiny by the immanent God. Hess's emphasis on the need to preserve man's ethical integrity as a task distinct from and equal in importance to institutional change was a sign of his conviction that man was ultimately independent of the configurations of material history: his ethical, trans-historical nature had its origins and continuing strength in the divine Spirit of history.

A note on Lukacs' critique of Hess in his *Moses Hess und die Probleme der idealistischen Dialektik*, in *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Jahrgang 12, 1926.

Lukacs' critique of Hess re-affirms Marx's condemnation in the *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto*. He denies that Hess made any significant contribution to the development of socialist thought and maintains that his utopianism necessarily had reactionary consequences. For Lukacs, Hess's attempt to go beyond Hegel by developing a philosophy of action that could consciously create the future fails to understand the essentially active character of Hegel's dialectic as well as falling a long way short of Hegel's concept of philosophy as 'the expression of history itself in thought and not as a philosophy about history' (p. 113). Hess's attempt to overcome Hegel's conservatism had no basis in 'the real subject of transforming *praxis*' (p. 116); socialist theory could develop fruitfully only as the reflection in consciousness of the practical dialectic of the proletariat's social existence.

Hess's dependence on Feuerbach was limited to an idealist version of the species-being concept, failing to use Feuerbach's materialism as a tool for converting Hegel's dialectic into a critique of political economy, as Marx and Engels were able to do. Feuerbach's concept of the species-being, and Hess's use of it, was based, for Lukacs, on an unhistorical immediacy that saw alienation as a strictly negative force that could be overcome by ethical demands or by extending knowledge of human nature. For Lukacs, Hegel's superior understanding of alienation as the expression of human spiritual activity in a series of concrete and historical necessary forms, each of which had to be lived through and overcome, showed that mediation was an essential characteristic of existence and that a universal concept of human nature was meaningless.

Lukacs is justified in contrasting the profound historical understanding of Hegel and Marx with Hess's schematic and often fanciful historical sequence. His demonstration of the unity of Hegel's and Marx's method shows clearly how much Marx went back beyond the Young Hegelians to Hegel for the methodology of historical materialism. For Lukacs, Marx's only debt to the Young Hegelians is Feuerbach's materialism — he ignores the influence of Bauer's *Kritik* and the philosophy of action of Cieszkowski and Hess. His understanding of Hess neglects the positive role that Hess gave to the alienations of religion, politics and economics in history. Hegel's dialectic is based on spiritual activity, but the fundamental motive of his philosophy is to achieve a reconciliation with reality, which

has its fullness — given the essential limits on individual self-realization in the rational state — only within the sphere of absolute spirit. Hess's rejection of philosophy as the highest human activity and recommendation of socially transforming action based on philosophic insight were elements in the critique of Hegel that were important in Marx's thought. The notion of a future state beyond historical conflict, whose freedom and abundance would be the overcoming of the dialectic of history, was the basis of Hess's understanding of communism and was also characteristic of Marx. Lukacs is correct to distinguish Hess's supra-historical concept of human nature from the thought of Marx, but he fails to appreciate its value for Hess as the ethical foundation of socialism. Hess showed awareness of the possibility that the historical materialist dialectic might not lead to socialism and complemented his understanding of the historical process with the possibility of an ethical critique of that process. His concept of socialism was not exclusively bound up with the revolutionary activity of an impoverished proletariat and involved a clear awareness of the role of all those who sought a social application of philosophical humanism.

### 3. CONCLUSION: THE ETHICAL WILL AS CREATOR OF THE FUTURE

For Ruge and Hess, the task of the disciples of Hegel in an age of political reaction was to restore to life the moral impetus to practical-critical action that lay dormant in Hegel's system. For Hess, the influence of Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* was crucial, while Ruge arrived at his own critique of Hegel through a study of the *Rechtsphilosophie* and an intimate knowledge of the political events that had occurred since Hegel's death.

For Hegel, the subjective passions and desires of individuals, realized by the assertive power of the finite will, were the chief motive power of history. The actions which stemmed from these subjective needs were given their true content and significance only by the integrative power of the *Weltgeist*, which united and reconciled the limited wills and actions of individuals into a social whole. The philosopher, in his act of speculative *post mortem*, was able to discern the relationship between the finite impulses of historical actors and the infinite purposes of the *Weltgeist*. Man's highest and most universal faculty, then, was not his acts of will, which were necessarily particular, but his act of thought. Thought recognized the life-process of the spirit at its fulfilment, while will and action related to the spirit unconsciously, as its instruments:

'It is in the will that the intrinsic finitude of intelligence has its beginning; and it is only by raising itself to become thought again, and endowing its aims with immanent universality, that the will cancels the difference of form and content and makes itself the objective, infinite will. They understand little of the nature of thinking and willing who suppose that while, in willing as such, man is infinite, in thinking, he, or even reason itself, is restricted. In so far as thinking and willing are still distinguished, the opposite is rather the truth, and will is thinking reason resolving itself to finitude.'<sup>131</sup>

For Hegel, a will which willed the fulfilment of universal ethical ideals – in contrast to individual needs – was either condemned to historical ineffectiveness, since it was always afraid to compromise its purity in the cut and thrust of action, or prone to sheer destructiveness, since it could never be satisfied with the particularity of any concrete institution or pattern of life. To will the universal, for Hegel, was not to will the realization of a universal ethical principle as an impetus to social action which could create a future more free and rational than the past. To will the universal was rather to choose to identify oneself with the ethical life already concretely present, to give one's own will the determinate content provided by the social institutions that were the contemporary resultant of complex historical action. Willing the universal was the re-enactment of social norms and values, not the attempt to give practical effect to a universal ideal which was the negation of contemporary reality.

For Cieszkowski, Hess and Ruge the task of the disciples of Hegel in an age when the rationality of the real appeared illusory was to re-discover the power of the will and of historical action, to use the speculative achievements of philosophy as the steppingstone to an act of will which was informed by a mature consciousness of the priorities of freedom and reason. For the exponents of the philosophy of action the possibility of a universal ethical will seemed open once Hegel had made clear the structure of reason in history: the will need no longer restrict itself to the selfish needs of individuals, contenting itself to be assigned its real role by reflection after the event. For Cieszkowski, the will, in its practical social action, presupposed philosophy since only philosophy could guide it in its task of creating the future. Thought could give man a consciousness of freedom, but only ethical will could achieve it. Rather than being selfish and particular, then, the will became the conscious agent of universal purposes: it no longer required integration into the purposes of the *Weltgeist* but consciously took these purposes to heart in its action. This universal *praxis*, for Cieszkowski, was 'the genuine, objective realisation of the truth which had been recognized; this is the good, that is, the practical which already contains the theoretical'.<sup>132</sup>

Mindful of the gap between rational and real, the ethical will identifies itself with the *Weltgeist*. This will is universal, conscious, ethical and creative of the future. It no longer understands ethical action as a lonely and self-sacrificial task of living by pure and transcendent ideals in an evil world: it knows, rather, that the immanent spirit of history assures the victory of good but depends on the conscious collaboration of human action for its realization. When Cieszkowski and Hess spoke of the ethical deed, the *freie Geistesstat*, they referred to action which attempted to rid itself of all particularity, of all the limitations

imposed by systems of social bondage, and which hoped to create the future as the realization of the image of man achieved by speculative philosophy.

The realization of reason by ethical action would result in a world which was no longer dominated by the distinction between practical and theoretical activity. A world in which the highest image of man had been realized could have no further use for pure speculation. The inwardness of thought had been directed towards the discovery of the presence of the spirit in its various mediations, in its hiddenness in a world of imperfection and suffering. It was subordinate to the ethical action which brought the historical spirit to man in its immediacy as the perfection of social relations:

‘that which is absolutely practical, social activity and life in the state . . . will from now on be decisive, and art and philosophy, which up to now were considered to be the highest entities, will be relegated to the role of abstract premisses of the life of the state. Being and thought must die in action, art and philosophy in social life, in order to re-emerge and blossom again in truth and in their highest form.’<sup>133</sup>

Cieszkowski’s Christian belief led him to stress that he understood the *Weltgeist* specifically as ‘providence’<sup>134</sup> and his understanding of ultimate human unity was in the form of an ideal Church of the future.<sup>135</sup> For Hess and Ruge, by contrast, the influence of the critique of religious alienation made by Bauer and Feuerbach meant that critical, future-oriented *praxis* must understand itself as the restoration to mankind of the dignity which it had deprived itself of by conferring ultimate value on a transcendent world of the divine. Both retained the language and inspiration of religion, while transforming its object of ultimate concern into a future society where the abstract ideals of philosophy and religion would be realized in concrete human relationships. Life in such a society would not be dominated by the Hegelian separation of moral action and theoretical contemplation, by the subordination of will to intellect: its life would be a universal *praxis*, spontaneously inspired by the theoretical achievements of the past without needing the explicit pursuit of theoretical clarification. Theory would no longer point to an ideal possible world since practice would have it already in its grasp.

This ideal corresponded in its basic features to the young Hegel’s understanding of the Greek *polis*. Like the *polis*, the society of universal *praxis* would not cultivate the ideal as a theoretical pursuit isolated from public social action, nor would it distinguish between state and civil society. For the young Hegel, Socrates was the philosopher who first threatened the *polis* by elevating an ideal of universal humanity above particular allegiance: for Ruge and Hess, in turn, Hegel was the

last philosopher to speak of an ideal world which could not be realized in practical social relations. Just as the young Hegel understood the true task of religion as ensuring the affective strength of the bonds of community, rather than indicating man's need to relate to any being transcending the community, so Ruge and Hess hoped to preserve a 'practical passion for the ideal' or a 'religion of communism' while insisting that any transcendent understanding of religion must be a threat to self-possessing humanity. The similarities between the notion of universal *praxis* and the young Hegel's ideal of the Greek *polis* demonstrate the way in which Hegel's radical disciples were able to upset the delicate philosophical balance of his system, dissolving it into its constituent parts and discovering the ardent concern for humanist community that lay at its origins.

Ruge's stress on the 'Fichtean deed' and Bauer's understanding of Hegel in terms of critical subjectivity were not derived specifically from the influence of Fichte or of any other thinker: these emphases were discovered by the Young Hegelians in the works of Hegel himself. By resolving Hegel's tension between finite and infinite will, by transposing the origins and grounding of human subjectivity from the common experience of worship in the religious community to an act of spontaneous self-understanding and self-appropriation the Young Hegelians transformed Hegel's doctrine of the complementary relationship of man and *Weltgeist* into an atheistic humanism. Rather than being a necessary orientation to the infinite reality which expressed itself in the world of nature and human action, religion became for Ruge and Hess a sign of the ultimate significance that the future possessed as the realization of freedom and justice. Religion was the ethical passion generated by the awareness of the gulf between man's present state and his social possibilities. Feuerbach had understood the true task of religion as the worship of the qualities and potentialities of the species: for Ruge and Hess this took on a radically historical character, since the species could only be realized through practical-critical action. For them religion was preeminently the dedication to the future of the species, the transformation of infinite God to humanist utopia. Like Durkheim after them, they understood religion as a necessary concomitant of human self-transcendence, but its true nature was not in its relationship to a really existing infinite, but rather an excitement induced by the possibility for self-realization of man as a species-being, which is the true infinite for the individual:

'If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion . . . Thus it is seen that whatever has been done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain: for it is necessarily the society that did it, and it is humanity that has reaped the fruits.'<sup>136</sup>



## CHAPTER 4

THE LATE SCHELLING: THE PHILOSOPHY OF MYTHOLOGY  
AND REVELATION1. THE CRITIQUE OF HEGEL AND THE FOUNDATIONS  
OF POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

In 1841, at the invitation of the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the aging Schelling came to Berlin to fulfil his own dream of once again initiating a new epoch in the history of philosophy, while at the same time attempting to satisfy the Prussian government by counteracting the subversive influence of the radical disciples of Hegel. The tenure of the professorship of philosophy gave Schelling every opportunity to present to an eager public the philosophy that he had been formulating ever since Hegel's scathing critique of his system of identity, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, had reduced him to silence. Convinced that Hegel's philosophy had been shown to be infertile, Schelling hoped to draw German cultural life back to the 'path of true progress'.<sup>1</sup>

Schelling introduced his lectures by noting that philosophy needed to absolve itself of the charge of dissolving morality and true religion. This was especially necessary since the most recent system of philosophy, which Schelling left conspicuously nameless, had already shown itself to be unstable. Hegel's system had claimed to provide a firm foundation for religion, but even some of his most faithful disciples granted that 'its deductions of Christian doctrines are no more than brilliant artifices'.<sup>2</sup> Schelling recognized that part of the blame for the dominance of the system was his own, since he took the credit for the crucial innovations that had led to its foundation. The anti-philosophical sentiment that had been aroused by the destructive and confusing effects of the break-up of Hegel's system must be corrected by the elaboration of a new philosophy built on entirely different principles. This new philosophy would not simply replace Hegel's system: its aim was a good deal more ambitious. It would, hoped Schelling, be the development of a new philosophical methodology, the setting out of a new science, in whose structure Hegel's system had a legitimate and important place. This would be the cure for the ills of Hegelianism, which resulted from its tendency to exceed its true boundaries, its failure to see that it was only 'a fragment of a greater whole'.<sup>3</sup> This new philosophy

would come at a time when thought had ceased to be an affair of the schools alone, when the nation had realized that these intellectual battles were the test of its own vitality and self-confidence. The revival of philosophy must be the revival of national life, since 'the salvation of the Germans is in scientific knowledge'.<sup>4</sup>

For Schelling, philosophy must begin with a consideration of man's own mysterious situation, placed between God and nature. Man has the task of leading created nature to fulfilment together with his own history, yet the laws of his own consciousness do not provide him with immediate insight into the laws of that spirit that pervades all of nature: the external world is as problematic to man as if he had no relationship to it at all. We cannot think of creation as achieving coherence in man, because it remains opaque to us despite our own introspection. The question of the meaning of creation is not asked from the standpoint of a self-possessing humanism, but rather in the hope of giving some sense and context to human life itself.

'man and his activity, far from making the world intelligible, are themselves beyond comprehension, driving me inevitably to a conviction of the wretchedness of all being, a conviction which has been expressed in ancient and modern times in so many agonized accents. It is man himself who drives me to the final, despairing question: why is there anything at all? why not nothing?'<sup>5</sup>

Philosophy is the 'most invaluable science' because it alone is able to satisfy the urgent need for an answer to this question. In an age of doubt and confusion, when the nation is tempted to cling to past illusions, there is a need for faith in the power of philosophy as it attempts to recast traditions of belief and custom in an enduring form. Schelling interprets periods of instability and conflict in terms similar to Bauer: history moves through catastrophe to an age of fulfilment and illumination. The insight of the philosophical elite can give the assurance of re-birth to those who see no hope:

'The more violently one wishes to portray the discord, conflict and threat of chaos in our time, the more certainly can the truly enlightened man perceive in it all only the premonition of a new creation, a great and permanent restoration, which would certainly not be possible without the agony at its birth, and which must be preceded by the ruthless destruction of everything that has become rotten, weak and defective.'<sup>6</sup>

Philosophy's task is to give birth to a new world of belief and values that can heal the wounds of change. It is a 'cure for the fragmentation of our time'.<sup>7</sup> True philosophy is not restricted to negation, but can give birth to ideas that restore the vitality and strength of national life. Poetry may reflect the joys of an untroubled age, but only philosophy

can offer a cure to a period of turmoil. Schelling's understanding of the role of philosophy gave it both an interpretive and a practical task. His assessment of the relationship between philosophy and *praxis* differed radically from that of the Young Hegelians because of his conflicting understanding of the importance of Hegel's philosophy. For Ruge and Hess, Hegel had brought idealist philosophy to a point of fulfilment that made an immediate engagement in *praxis* urgently necessary. Even for Bauer and Feuerbach, who both concentrated on the development of new critical philosophies rather than on political activity, Hegel's system had brought philosophy as it had always been conceived of to an end. For Schelling, however, Hegel's work represented a sad loss of time in the history of philosophy, the inflation of the meagre results of Schelling's own youthful works into a system that had no consciousness of its own limits. For Schelling, philosophy was still the chief instrument of human progress and integration, especially because its results were still so incomplete and unsatisfactory. Only a complete re-orientation of philosophical method could achieve the goal of re-founding religious belief on sound intellectual principles.

Schelling hoped to give a new impetus to the progress of philosophy by going back beyond Hegel to the work of Kant. For Schelling, it was Kant who had made all real religion impossible, in the sense of a relationship to a God who was conceived as the Lord of reality: 'if God was knowable as the Lord of reality, then there would be a science for which He would be the fundamental principle and in which reality could be derived from Him; but this is just what Kant denied.'<sup>8</sup> The result of Kant's critical work was that reason renounced the attempt to know the 'real being of God' and satisfied itself with God as a 'bare highest idea' which never had enough content to become the foundation of a philosophy of religion.

Kant could find no solution to the problem of the possibility of penetrating to the 'thing in itself' (*Ding an sich*), but the development of German idealism, building on his critique, led to the eventual formulation of the notion of absolute reason, for which reason itself becomes as comprehensive as its object and ultimately is seen to be the self-knowledge of the absolute. Such a concept suggests that reason may elucidate the laws of being without reference to experience at all. For Schelling, the philosophies of Fichte and of Hegel were guilty of this implication. Rationalist thought was correct in implying that reason had an innate power to derive a necessary system of truth from *a priori* premisses, but it neglected the role of experience in providing awareness of the quality of existence itself. Schelling granted the *a priori* power of reason, accepting that the self-reflection of consciousness can provide the basic structure of being:

'reason, in reflecting on itself, can become its own object and discover in itself the prior principle (*Prius*) or, what is the same thing, the subject of all being, and in this it has the means or principle of an *a priori* knowledge of all existence.'<sup>9</sup>

*What* exists, can, therefore, be extrapolated from the inner core of the faculty of reason, but this is no more than a system of possibilities. To confirm *that* these entities exist, however, must be the work of experience. The role of experience is not chiefly to provide knowledge of entities beyond the scope of reason, since the concept of an absolute science of reason renders this superfluous, at least in terms of the general structure of being, but rather to impart to man the quality of existence itself, to mark the difference between reality and a purely rational system of abstract possibilities.

For Schelling, Hegel's mistake had been to restrict his understanding of the work of philosophy to this process of rational elucidation of the essence of things. His emphasis on the identity of being and thought was correct only insofar as it affirmed that thought could discover the basic structure of being: the reality of existence always remained distinct from the system of possibilities produced by the internal reflection of reason. 'Reason can provide the content of everything that occurs in experience; it grasps what is real, but yet not reality itself.'<sup>10</sup> Experience, then, plays the role of a control for reason 'through which it demonstrates, that what has been discovered *a priori* is not a chimera'.<sup>11</sup> It relates to reason not so much as a source of basic knowledge, but rather as a companion, confirming the quality of existence in partnership with reason's development of the structure of essences.

Through introspection, reason discovers that its scope and grasp is as infinite as the range of being itself: it can formulate an absolutely prior principle (*absolute Prius*) which corresponds to absolute existence. Thus the science of philosophy emerges, focussing on the characteristics of this infinite possibility inherent in being. This is not the passive possibility of being taught by the Wolffian scholastics. It is the fluid and creative ground of being and cannot be thought of except in its transition to being, from possibility to actuality:

'the infinite potentiality of being or infinite power to be, which is the immediate content of reason, is not a bare capability for existence, but rather the immediate prior principle, the immediate concept of reason itself; it is this because of its own nature, always and eternally . . . it is, just as soon as it is thought, on the point of passing over into existence; it is nothing other than the concept of being, that which cannot be held back from being, and because of that immediately eluding thought and becoming existence.'<sup>12</sup>

The immanence within reason of the conceptual power to grasp this infinite potential of being is the foundation of logic, but concepts can

never reach beyond this original *a priori* and discover the existence of the actual world. Once the infinite power to be transforms itself into the arbitrary concreteness of real existence, reason's grasp of the infinite *a priori* becomes insufficient. The power to be demands change and movement, so that the *a priori* immanent to reason ceases to be comprehensive; reason continues to grasp the origin of being, but cannot follow it out into existence itself. Philosophy must complement the process of pure reason with the work of experience in discovering how possibility is fulfilled in actuality.

In attempting to go beyond the infinite potential to be (*das unendliche Seynkönnen*) to reach being itself, reason has no means of defining being other than knowing that it is not not-being. This definition is characteristic of a negative science of reason, and for Schelling the task of philosophy is to discover and elaborate a new 'positive' philosophy, which will study the true procession of being from the infinite potential to be. For Schelling, positive philosophy was the rejection of Hegel's attempt to make the transition from being to not-being without any departure from the logic of concepts. Hegel saw the origin of existence, in Schelling's words, in a

'progressive self-realization of the idea, which all the same remained only a step-by-step heightening of the concept, which still remained concept even at its highest power, without ever achieving a transition to reality, to genuine existence.'<sup>13</sup>

Hegel's attempt to bridge the gap between concept and existence, possibility and reality, by using such formulae as the 'self-realization of the idea' could not hide the fact that his philosophy recognized no genuine distinction of kind between the two worlds of essence and existence. Reason's grasp of the infinite potential to be gave it no mastery over the eventual contents of existence in their actuality. It could not follow this *a priori* out into the concrete world and still rely on nothing but its own immanent logic. Hegel's attempt to contain divine existence within a system<sup>o</sup> of concepts revealed the inadequacy of his method. Hegel's thought:

'was immanent from beginning to end, advancing merely as thought and in no sense transcendent philosophy. Because of this, when his thought finally made claim to knowledge of God when it had only demonstrated Him to be a necessary rational idea, the inevitable consequence was that God was deprived of all transcendence, drawn into this system of logic, and reduced to a bare element of logic, to a concept. Further, since the liveliest idea of existence was always associated with the concept of God, there emerged that mistaken and inauthentic expression, the "self-movement of the idea", words which personified the idea and ascribed to it an existence which it did not and could not have.'<sup>14</sup>

For Schelling, the role of 'negative' philosophy (or '*reine Vernunftwissenschaft*') was to refine and elucidate logical principles, while positive philosophy attempted the wider task of exploring the relationships of this system of principles to the world of actual existence. Hegel's mistake had been to confuse these two philosophical kingdoms, and to assume that 'a negative philosophy stretched beyonds its limits' could perform the same tasks as positive philosophy. The worst result of this confusion was Hegel's inclusion of the divine nature within the necessary laws of logic: this was the ultimate source of the atheism of his more radical pupils. Hegel had overlooked the essential complementarity of negative and positive philosophy in his belief that a system of pure reason could contain and comprehend all reality. His pupils had even claimed that his philosophy furnished 'the full and genuine knowledge of the divine existence, which Kant had denied to human reason . . . even Christian dogmas were a light task for it'.<sup>15</sup>

Hegel's fundamental error had been to ignore Kant's insistence on the inability of pure reason to go beyond itself to existence. Kant's critique of the ontological proof had shown that reflection on the essence of God can never be sufficient to prove his existence. The role of a true 'negative' philosophy was to posit the notion of God as the highest *Vernunftidee*, not, as Hegel had attempted, to prove his existence. Kant had himself restricted reason to this negative role, although making a limited attempt to found a positive philosophy by postulating God's existence through practical reason: the existence of God was a necessary condition for the 'highest good' towards which, for Kant, the moral life was oriented. For Schelling the key question was whether or not a new type of positive philosophy was possible after Kant's destruction of traditional metaphysics, a philosophy which could approach the problem of the existence of God within a much broader framework than morality alone. Such a philosophy would transcend the division between religion as feeling (Jacobi, Schleiermacher) and as subordinate to pure reason (Hegel). For Schelling, Hegel himself was unclear whether or not he allowed for a positive philosophy distinct from pure reason – whether or not the *Logic* presented the essence of the whole of his system or only of part. He moved from the *Logic* to the philosophy of nature without realizing the fundamental character of this transition, relying on figurative phrases such as 'the idea resolves itself to . . .' and 'nature is a descent from the idea' which gave no substance to his claim to have discerned a commensurability between logic and existence. Hegel's whole approach to philosophy obscured the difference between the possibility of existence represented by a system of logic and the actual existence of the prereflective world.<sup>16</sup>

For Schelling, those who attacked him in defence of Hegel did so not because they were against the notion of positive philosophy but because

they insisted that it must be built on the foundations of Hegel's own thought. Those who rejected Schelling claimed that Hegel's thought had only to be developed to furnish the elements, such as divine personality and individual immortality, that were lacking in the explicit presentation of his philosophy. They had failed to realize that Hegel's thought was a closed system, which could only be distorted by any attempt to graft essentially alien elements onto it. Hegel's thought had recognized no need for a distinct 'positive philosophy' because it understood the nature of God as expressible in the concepts of speculative reason and emphasized the possibility of a philosophical proof of God's necessary existence. What Schelling disputed was the power of pure reason to arrive at anything more than a concept of God – a concept which necessarily fell short of reality. God's freedom was always prior to his essence. The necessary laws of logic, which in rationalist (= negative) philosophy may be employed as the *a priori* foundations of a proof of the existence of God, become in positive philosophy only the consequence of God's existence, which itself cannot be proven by *a priori* reasoning but only demonstrated *a posteriori* by reflection on the activity of the living God in creation. Positive philosophy derives from the urge to transcend any system of necessary causes and the universe of created being to that which is prior to all logic and all abstraction. The philosophical desire for an authentically supra-rational absolute is the foundation of positive philosophy: 'I desire that which transcends being, which is not mere existence, but more than that: the Lord of being'.<sup>17</sup> This wish alone must be sufficient justification for the experiment of elaborating a new kind of philosophy.

The limitation of pure thought is that it can grasp being only *in potentia*. Thought is constantly drawn beyond its own powers by the transition of being from possibility to actuality. Its ability to grasp the essence of things is constantly threatened by the vitality of actual existence:

'Potentiality is, according to its nature, at every moment on the point of springing into existence. Through the nature of its own content thought is drawn outside itself, since that which has passed over into existence is no longer the content of bare reasoning – it has become the object of a knowledge that transcends thinking alone.'<sup>18</sup>

Yet, for Schelling, positive philosophy is not simply a restatement of empiricism, but rather an attempt to overcome the division between rationalism and empiricism in the history of philosophy. Hegel had attacked the extreme forms of empiricism as necessitating the denial of all supra-sensual reality, the reduction of ethics to custom, and the rejection of the necessary laws of reason. His critique had failed to recognize the value of an empiricism that accepts the power of reason

to grasp the laws of being, but at the same time insists that the foundation of these laws in God's Lordship is not accessible to pure reason and must be established by a study of man's religious experience. Positive philosophy might, then, also be called a 'metaphysical empiricism', which grants the power of abstract reason, but which insists on the primal act of freedom at the origin of its necessary laws:

'Everything which cannot be posited by pure thought, everything for which I depend on experience, must have been grounded in a free act. The contention that that which is the origin of all those things that are known by experience could itself not be something known by experience but rather something abstract, something to be posited by pure reason, was the occasion for thinking of God, when he was seen as the ultimate cause of all empirical existence, as remotely as possible from anything empirical, that is, from anything human.

There is, then, a metaphysical empiricism too . . . there are other systems which can be subsumed under the heading of philosophical empiricism besides those sensationist doctrines which restrict all knowledge to sense experience or which even deny the existence of anything transcendent.'<sup>19</sup>

The explanation of all reality in terms of necessity is, for Schelling, typical of rationalism. The nature of God could, for rationalism, be grasped by concepts since it was characterized by necessary relationships:

'For rationalism, nothing can come into being through an act, through free creation — it recognizes only essential relationships.'<sup>20</sup>

Hegel's rationalism, for Schelling, sprang from a negative source, from the need of the absolute to express itself in creation. His understanding of the absolute denied it an authentic identity apart from the world. Positive philosophy, in contrast, is based on the affirmation of God's absolute self-possession independent of his creation. God's most essential freedom is the freedom to create or not to create:

'Historical philosophy proceeds from a positive, i.e. existing, prior principle, which does not *need* to pass over into being and which therefore posits being only with perfect freedom, without in any way being impelled to do so through its own character; it does not, indeed, posit its own being, immediately, but a being different from its own being, a being in which it itself is as much negated or suspended as posited, and in any case posited only mediately.'<sup>21</sup>

God's creation of the world does not proceed from his own need to evolve to self-possessing being but is rather a radical affirmation of his own free will. There are no necessary interconnections between God and creation: because of this, for Schelling, we cannot include God's own nature in any conceptual system derived from the observation of



created being. There is no path of pure reason from world to God.

Positive philosophy, then, seeks the being which is the condition for the possibility of rational thought. This being is not accessible to the ordinary methods of empiricism, since all being open to experience is only relatively independent of thought, insofar as it must be perceived and made intelligible through the categories of thought. Positive philosophy depends on that being which is absolutely outside thought and also, therefore, outside all experience. It seeks to give us knowledge of 'utterly transcendent being' rather than of the 'relative *a priori*' which is the foundation of the science of pure reason and which is still within the circle of created being. This 'transcendent being', or *absolutes Prius* (absolute *a priori*) has no necessity to become concrete existence. This necessity to move out into the world of concrete existence relativizes the *Prius* of rationalism, subjecting it to a necessary process which can be fully expressed by reason. The foundation of positive philosophy, by contrast, is

'the absolutely prior principle which has no necessity to transform itself into being. When it does make this transformation, then this can only be the consequence of a free act, an act which itself is only something purely empirical, knowable only *a posteriori*, just as any act is not deduced *a priori* but only recognized *a posteriori*.'<sup>22</sup>

Rejecting the necessary connection of God and the world in a system of reason, positive philosophy posits an absolutely prior principle which is prior to and independent of the laws of reason, and then attempts to show that this *absolutes Prius* is God by recourse to experience, especially the religious experience recorded in human history. In contrast to negative philosophy, which has its truth in the immanent necessity of its own logic, positive philosophy seeks knowledge: the *absolutes Prius* is seen to be God through the structure of his creative actions.

The method of positive philosophy is to examine man's historical experience and to determine whether this confirms that the *absolutes Prius* he intuits is in fact God. The role of experience is not to prove God's existence, but rather to show that the absolute foundation of the possibility of thought and knowledge is at the same time God. Only an examination of religious experience can demonstrate that this *absolutes Prius* is the active, living and creating God. Pure reason can conceive of this *absolutes Prius* and can demonstrate that it will have certain consequences in terms of created being: it can set up a system of possibility. Experience, in turn, can show that these possibilities are in fact actual: that the absolute is shown to be a living God through its realization of these possibilities. God exists because we see his works, and because we know that these works are the actualization of the consequences we

deduce from the notion of an *absolutes Prius*. This, for Schelling, is the meaning of 'metaphysical empiricism'. The purpose of positive philosophy, as a philosophical examination of the totality of human history, is to be 'nothing else than the progressive and constantly accumulating proof of the really existing God, a proof which strengthens itself with every step'.<sup>23</sup> The consequence of this is that positive philosophy can never pretend to be a closed system – it grows as man's historical experience grows, and it remains the love of wisdom rather than the attainment of wisdom:

'since the kingdom of reality is not closed, but rather constantly heading towards its completion, then this proof also is never complete and this science is only philosophy.'<sup>24</sup>

Positive philosophy's first task, however, is to clarify the notion of an *absolutes Prius*. In contrast to the ontological argument, which saw God as the 'ens, ex cuius essentia sequitur existentia', Schelling emphasizes that the act of existence is prior to any notion of essence. Essence follows from existence rather than *vice versa*. Spinoza came closest to the foundations of positive philosophy when he described God as that 'quod non cogitari potest, nisi existens', yet even he assumed that this necessary existent was God, without providing any means of bridging the gap between a concept and the living origin of the universe. The ontological proof, similarly, proves only that if God does exist he must exist necessarily. It does not show that he does exist. For Schelling, the priority of existence over essence implies that God does not exist through a transition from potency to act. If God does exist, he exists before his concept: his freedom is prior to his nature. For Schelling, the demonstration of the existence of God depends first of all on the clarification of the meaning of necessary existence as applied to God: this does not refer simply to that being who is prior to all others, something which shares the same universe as other beings, but rather to a being whose existence is the ground of possibility for all other beings. The task of positive philosophy is to attempt to derive God's existence from this necessary existence through recourse to the world of human experience, to show that the necessary being which is the condition for the possibility of rational thought and of existence is in fact the living God:

'Thus in positive philosophy I do not proceed from the concept of God, as past metaphysics and the ontological argument attempted to do; it is rather this notion of God *as concept* that I leave by the wayside, in order to proceed from simple existence, in which nothing is implied but existence itself – to proceed from this and see whether I can reach the divinity ... I cannot, in fact, proceed from the

concept of God, in order to prove God's existence, but I can reverse the procedure and proceed from the concept of simple, indubitable existence and demonstrate *its* divinity.'<sup>25</sup>

Schelling's philosophical endeavour was the attempt to bridge the gap between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham. For him, contrary to what Hegel believed, philosophy can never prove the existence of God, but only demonstrate that the existence of God is the best possible interpretation of the ultimate conditions of reality. The task of positive philosophy is to show that the conceptual absolute of pure thought is the God of Abraham, not by conceptual proof, but by a study of the evidence offered by the totality of human history. This would confirm the hitherto unfounded assertion of Christian metaphysics that the God of philosophy, *actus purus*, is one and the same as the God of Abraham.

For Schelling, God's Lordship over being is guaranteed only if he himself is not part of the dialectic of being. He must therefore be prior to anything which simply 'has existence'. To properly formulate what he sees as the utterly necessary character of divine existence, Schelling speaks of this eternal necessity becoming present to God himself only with his reflection on it. Only by a movement of self-reflection can God distinguish his own eternal essence from this eternal, necessary existence which is prior to all things that have existence. 'That which exists from time immemorial precedes all concepts.'<sup>26</sup> God's necessary existence is not of the same kind as the necessary truths of logic or mathematics: it is the ground of all necessity. Schelling hastens to add that God's unconscious existence, his pre-essential existence, is not something that precedes his self-conscious existence in temporal sequence, but only in the order of being. 'This existence that he has beforehand, before even his own awareness of it, and without which he could not be called God, this existence is a thing of the moment, which is immediately superseded.'<sup>27</sup> From all eternity, then, God realizes the possibility of suspending this utterly pre-conceptual existence in order to transform it into an existence that is self-positing and freely chosen. God acts to transform the darkest ground of necessary being into self-conscious, personal existence. In Schelling's interpretation, God's movement from 'absolute existence preceding all thought' to personal self-possession, essential being, is not analogous to the rise to self-consciousness that God achieves through human history in Hegel's philosophy, since God is at all times and in all forms secure in his own being, absolutely without need of change. God has no need to externalize himself in the world of 'beings'. The *absolutes Prius*

'since it is secure in its infinite being, knows itself to be free to accept or reject other being; it itself exists independently of concrete existence, it is an existence transcending existence (understanding by this an existence that exists independently of the act of existence). For it, it is absolutely a matter of indifference, whether it adopts this other being or not, whether it realizes it through a simple act of will, thus subjecting the existence that precedes all thought to tension and negation, or whether it allows this merely projected being to lapse back into potentiality, or whether, indeed, it is left as mere possibility.'<sup>28</sup>

Positive philosophy attempts to show that pure factuality, sheer 'thatness' is the foundation of God's nature as the 'Lord of being', and from this starting point it proceeds to explain the existence of created being through its relation to this Lordship. For Schelling, the need for positive philosophy arises out of the final crisis of the pure science of reason. 'If God, the final result (of pure reason) is to be expelled from the idea, then the science of reason itself is abandoned.'<sup>29</sup> The dissolution of Hegel's school had revealed the fatal instability of a pure science of reason that claimed to include existence within its own laws. For Schelling, this intellectual and cultural confusion is the context of need for his own 'positive' philosophy. Just as positive philosophy deals with that in being which is outside thought, so its source is in a practical impulse rather than in the self-sufficiency of reason. Man leaves the abstractions of negative philosophy in order to satisfy his own longing for a God that is more than a *Vernunftidee*, for the real existence of the divine person:

'Him, him it seeks, with whom there is providence, who, himself real existence, confronts the reality of the Fall, a God, in short, who is the Lord of being. (Not just transmundane, as he is if conceived as ultimate cause, but supramundane.) In this alone does it see the truly highest good. Indeed, the meaning of the contemplative life was none other than to pierce the universal and reach personality. Person seeks person.'<sup>30</sup>

The ultimate purpose of positive philosophy is to provide the foundations for a new mode of philosophical religion: not the *Vernunftreligion* of the Enlightenment, to which, for Schelling, Hegel's philosophy of religion also belonged, but a philosophical re-telling of the living historical truth of the traditions of mythological and revealed religion. Only there could the 'Lord of being' be found.

Schelling's last attempt to clarify the relationship of God and pure reason was made in his short essay *Über die Quelle der ewigen Wahrheiten* (*On the source of the eternal truths*) of 1850. In this piece he recognized that an emphasis on the independence of God from the laws of reason made the transcendent foundation of these laws problematic, and he attempted to re-define the relationship of divine personality and

eternal truths. Schelling began by noting that a *prima facie* understanding of the eternal truths must see them as founded not in the divine will, since this must make them contingent, but rather as inextricably involved with the divine essence itself. The laws of logic and mathematics and the distinction between good and evil thus become part of the unalterable structure of the universe, invested with the eternity of God's own nature. Yet such a system of eternal laws must in turn restrict God himself in his creative and revelatory action. 'Thus we are referred to an eternal reason that exists independently of the divine will, whose limits or laws may not be transgressed by divine understanding in its own creations and projections.'<sup>23</sup> Hegel's system, the most recent arbiter of thought, had identified God with reason and found this divine reason in the structure of created being: yet if reason is thus to be identified with God, it becomes impossible to explain the contingency of history, the persistence of evil, and the resistance of reality to pure reason. If the divine could be identified with reason, then man could only assume that divine reason was untrue to itself, revealing itself in a world of self-contradictory imperfection. The problem becomes more complex when we insist on God's nature as utter individuality, pure act: what can be the relation of universal reason, a system of abstract essences, to the sheer existence of irreducible individuality, to a divine personality? Can they be identified, or only put in some kind of contingent relationship?

'Thus the relationship is now defined so that God is the universal essence, but how or because of what necessity he is this is undefined. As far as the 'how' is concerned, it is maintained that God is the totality of possibility for all eternity, before all activity, and thus before all will. But yet he himself is not this totality. In him himself is no 'what', no 'thing', he is the pure 'that' — *actus purus*. And so we can ask all the more, if in God himself there is no 'what', no universal, then by what necessity does it come to pass that that which is in itself free of all 'what', all essence, becomes the universal essence, that 'what' that comprehends everything?'<sup>32</sup>

God, then, is utter individuality over whom no universal necessity prevails. Yet without some universality no science, no knowledge, is possible. If God is pure freedom, can he be known? There must a 'what' to know, over and above the simple 'that' of existence:

'God has in himself nothing but the pure act of his own being; yet this, his existence, would be no truth, if he were not *something* . . . if he had no relationship to thought, a relationship not to a concept, but to the concept of concepts, the idea.'<sup>33</sup>

Idea cannot be considered the highest reality, indentifiable with God, but yet must be seen to be in some relationship to God, in order to give substance to the activity of human reason. The individual is prior to the universal, yet can realize itself by passing over into the circle of reason and knowledge, appropriating a universal essence: this is the notion that Schelling opposes to a theory of God, as universal being, who realizes himself through the process of creation as individuation. For knowledge to be possible, God must be essence as well as existence, a 'what' as well as a 'that', and yet this essence, to which the universal laws of reason are inextricably connected, must not be something which compromises God's individuality, his priority to all conceptualization.

For Schelling, these two needs are only reconcilable in an understanding of God's character as 'the universal essence, the unity of all possibilities' as so necessary to his being, so much a matter of course for him, that it cannot affect the core of his existence. This universal essence is so much a necessary aspect of God that it is independent of his own volition, distanced from his utter existence, and therefore, in a sense, contingent to him. Schelling borrows from Aristotle a geometrical analogy: the sum of the angles of any triangle is two right angles, and thus the concept of a right angle is inextricably connected with the notion of a triangle. Yet a right angle is not essential to the definition of a triangle — there are triangles without right angles.

'Precisely because God is this other without willing to be, without His own explicit involvement, and thus, as regards Him Himself, accidentally, so it must be considered something which is coincident to Him, a *symbebekos* in the Aristotelian sense. It is necessary, indeed . . . but yet not part of God's essence, something in relation to which God's essence remains free.'<sup>34</sup>

## 2. THE DOCTRINE OF THE POWERS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MYTHOLOGY

Schelling's critique was based on his conviction that philosophy could develop a more fruitful understanding of the living God of religion than that elaborated by Hegel. The intention of the positive philosophy was to point out the internal limitations of rationalism, while at the same time indicating a way beyond these limitations by means of a new methodology of 'metaphysical empiricism'. Schelling's critique of Hegel had stressed the independence of the divine from any necessary system that could legislate for created existence and the inability of pure reason to demonstrate that the *absolutes Prius* was a really existing divine personality. Yet the success or failure of his attempt to provide an alternative to Hegel's speculative re-telling of Christian doctrine

depended on his ability to show that his reading of the religious history of man, which he had proclaimed as the most fruitful source of knowledge of God, was less guilty of absorbing a complex world of symbols and traditions into a pre-conceived speculative whole than Hegel's had been. If the difference, for Schelling, between his own system and Hegel's was his own modesty in attempting to learn of God from the acts of his creation and revelation rather than applying the structure of human reason to God's life, then the way in which Schelling approached the facts of religious history would demonstrate whether or not he was able to give his project anything more than a fragmentary, unfulfilled character.

Schelling's emphasis on the study of the history of religions, and especially of ancient mythology, was the continuation of a tradition begun by the German romantics in the early years of the nineteenth century. The cumulative mythological tradition of the historical religions could, for the romantics, provide a new religious alternative for Europe, rejecting both the abstract supreme being of deism and the authoritarian dogma of the Christian churches. The impoverished religious sense of Europe could, the romantics hoped, be nourished by contact with the richness of mythological tradition. Under the influence of Schleiermacher's *Reden*, the young Friedrich Schlegel, in his *Rede über die Mythologie (Speech on Mythology)* of 1800 and *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (On the language and wisdom of India)* of 1808 had attempted to realize the ideal of a re-discovery of the ancient unity of religious experience that could restore the religious life of Europe. Schlegel's own studies of Hindu practice had convinced him that this search was illusory, but other scholars and thinkers of the Romantic school had continued the search, making exhaustive and painstaking researches into all the available evidence on ancient mythology, attempting to establish that all its various traditions were informed by the unifying truths of one great primal revelation. Two of the greatest works of this genre were Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen (Symbolism and mythology of the ancient peoples, especially the Greeks)* and Joseph Görres' *Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt (History of the myths of the Asian world)*, both published in 1810. The intention of these works was to show, in opposition both to deism and Christian orthodoxy, that the religious history of man was a continuum that extended back to the earliest times, and that any attempt to set up a rational or revealed religion that rejected the content and validity of ancient myth would necessarily cut contemporary man off from the abiding sources of religious experience. Schelling's attempt to found a new philosophical religion on the basis of a 'positive' philosophy depended on a similar view of the importance of myth. In contrast to Görres and Creuzer, however, he

hoped to be able to elaborate a philosophy of mythology which could replace a historical demonstration of the unity of mythology by a philosophical demonstration of the necessary interconnection between individual mythologies and their fulfilment in revelation. His philosophy of mythology and revelation was intended to be the fulfilment of an important preoccupation of German Romanticism as well as the solution to the metaphysical and epistemological problems that he considered Hegel had left unsolved.

Myth, for Schelling, was not the conscious product of the priests, a sensuous dressing for religious dogma, but rather the creation of the whole people, expressing its ideals in an unconscious and spontaneous form:

‘through an intertwining of natural poetry and philosophy, without deliberate and conscious reflection but in life itself, a people creates for itself the noble forms that it needs in order to express its temperament and imagination, through which it feels itself lifted to a higher plane, which retrospectively ennoble and beautify its own life, and which are as deep in meaning as they are poetically beautiful.’<sup>35</sup>

Myth is the first grasping at religious truth by the developing peoples: mythological polytheism was not a decline from an original monotheism caused by man’s awe before natural forces, as Hume had claimed, nor the product of man’s inarticulate worship of nature, but rather the first steps towards true religion. Man’s original monotheism, for Schelling, was not the fertile communion with creative nature that the earlier Romantics had pictured, but rather a total subjugation to the forces of the divine:

‘man, when he simply *is* and has not yet become anything, is consciousness of God; he does not have this consciousness, he *is* it, and precisely in this in-action, in this immobility, does he posit the true God.’<sup>36</sup>

The task of man in history is to break away from this identification of his own consciousness with God, transforming it into a free relationship, a worship in spirit and truth. This emphasis is Schelling’s chief argument against the theory of myth as deliberate invention: myth must be understood as part of a necessary process of liberation, a movement leading consciousness away from its infant dependence towards a discovery of new dimensions of the divine nature. The study of myth becomes a study of the development of the ‘theogonic process’ in human history, a reflection of man’s growing freedom in his relationship to God. As such it is also the basis of a philosophy of history, since the stages of the theogonic process of mythopoesis are epochs of historical time, beginning with the first break-up of the monolithic God-



consciousness. Schelling maintains the truth of myth as a process: no stage in its development can be absolutized, but the whole does reflect man's search for a true relationship to God.

The unity of God, for Schelling, is the product of a resolution of internal powers (*Potenzen*) that has been achieved by the divine will. Man's original state was in subjugation to the unity of God, but with his choice of freedom these powers asserted their own individual character and their interplay was the substance of the mythological process. The history of man is thus determined by his struggle to achieve a re-union of the conflicting powers within creation, to find the original unbroken image of God, no longer as an overpowering fact of consciousness but as the one truth of a free and independent humanity:

'the same powers which in their co-operation and unity made human consciousness into the knowledge of God (*das Gott setzende*) become, in their division, the causes of a process in which the gods are posited and thus the origin of mythology.'<sup>37</sup>

This mythological process is a sequence of moments, each of which became the role of a separate people. The world of history, the realm of conflict that man has made from the original order of creation, witnesses the struggle of the potencies in the mythologies of the ancient world. The first epoch is the age of chaos: the world of being that will become nature has not yet been conquered by order. It resists becoming the stuff of nature, but with its materialization into the forms of the universe the first human worship begins, Sabism, the worship of the stars. This is the time of 'relative monotheism' (*der relativ einer Gott*): man has left the original unity of the true God, only to be dominated by the crude monotony of this exclusive oneness. With the complete subjugation of chaos, the separate peoples emerge from the unified *Urvolk* and 'successive' polytheism begins as one high god is followed by another: Uranos, the god of chaos, becomes the passive Urania, and Dionysus appears. With the final suppression of chaos all three powers are present and three mythologies (Egyptian, Indian and Greek) are possible and in fact exist.<sup>38</sup>

The development of mythology, then, represents a transformation of the human consciousness from an original state of crude monotheism, through the various systems of polytheism, to a refined and spiritual monotheism which may be receptive to revelation. Schelling both affirms and denies an original fullness of revelation: man's consciousness did posit God, but this was God in His anger, God as distant from man, God as monolithic domination. The development of mythology is a path from monotheism to monotheism, but the world of freedom and the spirit is what distinguishes the end from the beginning:

'in the genesis of mythology consciousness is indeed dislodged from its original relationship to God, but precisely thus — through this *ekstasis* itself — is it subjected to a process through which it will be brought back to this primal relationship.'<sup>39</sup>

Thus the development of mythology is a process which occurs inevitably in the history of all peoples and from it the philosopher of mythology attempts to abstract a portrait of God's own life and of his creative relationship to the world. For Schelling, the study of God's nature and his free creative acts could only be made from the totality of human history. Within this totality, the distinction between revelation and pagan mythology became one of degree only. Christianity was to be understood as the culmination of a long sequence of representations of the divine nature. It could itself be understood only within the context of a study of mythology. This immediately turned the historical focus of Schelling's system away from modern European history, where Hegel had discerned the work of the spirit in man's acts of self-liberation and self-knowledge, to the ancient world.

The three powers, which in their unity constitute the divine nature, may be variously interpreted as material, efficient and final cause, as possibility, actuality and necessity, and finally as the three living persons in the Godhead. The doctrine of three powers is, for Schelling, the foundation of a true understanding of the trinity — a knowledge of God's nature which is not unique to Christianity, but which is at the basis of all religions and of any philosophical understanding of creation. These powers may be set in tension, so that the primal unity of the divine nature is replaced by a conflict. Yet this is not a process in which God 'risks' His own existence, but one in which he freely 'suspends' His unity of essence in order to re-discover it at a higher level through a dialectical process:

'the divine being is not abolished by this tension of the powers but only suspended, yet the intent of this suspension is none other than to posit really and in act what was not possible by any other means. This whole process is simply the process of generation of the divine being — the theogonic process, whose highest and most universal concept has now been discovered, and shown to be utterly real. And thus, through this marvel of the transposition or re-arrangement of the powers the secret of the divine being and divine life is revealed.'<sup>40</sup>

For Schelling, the role of this theory of divine action is to provide a solution to the 'greatest problem of all science': the explanation of the origin of the world, the question: Why is there anything rather than nothing? In this temporary suspension of the divine unity, the powers become the exoteric form of God. The dialectic of these powers, as quasi-divine metaphysical forces, is the epochal undercurrent of crea-

tion history. Creation is God's own dialectic of self-fragmentation and self-restoration, performed in the security of absolute self-possession. Since the powers are not themselves God, but rather forces that are divine only in a state of complete unity, they do not contradict the truth of monotheism. An understanding of their activity is essential to a knowledge of the way monotheism emerges as the highest truth of the historical religions. The three powers occupy an order of being between God Himself and created nature; they are quasi-divine forces, demi-urges, which provide us with an explanation of the universal presence of polytheism in ancient religion. In the fullness of truth offered by revelation the three powers are seen in their final form, once more restored to unity, as the three persons of the divine nature. Schelling's *Potenzenlehre* allows him to speak of God as outside the dialectic of creation, utterly self-sufficient, since it is not the fullness of the divine nature which is involved in creation, but only its fragmented form.

Schelling's task is to provide a sufficient reason for this process of the three powers without casting any doubt on God's perfect self-possession. Any suggestion that God 'needs' such an evolution from the darkness of pre-conscious existence to self-knowledge and personality must suggest a return to an understanding of creation as the midwife of God's own perfection. It would imply as well that human history and human reason are crucial elements in God's own evolution, returning Schelling to the position that he devised the positive philosophy to refute. To avoid this, Schelling stresses the role of the dialectic of the three quasi-divine powers not as an evolution of the divine nature, but rather as the basic structure of creation and revelation. God can abstract himself from this dialectical interplay of the elements of his own nature, which are all that the world may see of him until the fullness of revelation.

'Even without this (realization) God knows himself to be the almighty One and All. What then can move him to make the free decision to venture into this process? The reason for this decision cannot be a purpose which he wishes to achieve in relation to himself.'<sup>41</sup>

In relation to creation, the dialectic of the three powers represents a preliminary answer to the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' They are 'the conditions of the possibility of existence of previously non-existent entities'. These powers are living, demiurgic forces, rather than mere concepts or ways of grasping the character of divine energy. Yet they can also be understood as the true meaning of the basic causal categories whose definition has been the business of philosophy from its beginnings.<sup>42</sup> The study of these powers is the core of philosophy, since these are none other than what the Greeks called

*archai* and 'philosophy is nothing other than *epistēmē tōn archōn*, the science of pure principles'.<sup>43</sup> Aristotle described the powers as material, efficient and final cause, but the link between their roles as categories and as demiurges is better supplied in terms similar to those of Plato. The first power is

'that which exceeds its own power and its own limits, the boundless, *to apeiron*, that which needs to be restricted. The second *archē* acts as the definer, as the *ratio determinans* of all of nature, the setter of limits . . . . The third *archē* is the cause which defines itself, the cause which is its own material and object as well as definition and limit; subject and object = spirit.'<sup>44</sup>

The dialectic of the powers dominates the consciousness of man, since he is the aim and end-point of the whole *Naturprozess*. Within man's consciousness the fragmentation of the divine unity is reflected, but it is here also that the restoration of the divine, through the reconciliation of the powers, occurs. It is this dialectic of the powers, representing for Schelling God's freely chosen path of conscious re-integration as well as the structure of creation, which gives such importance to the history of mythology. It is within pagan mythology that this dialectic is brought to the point where revelation becomes possible. Man has from the beginning been 'der Gott setzende' ('God positing') and the forms in which he conceived God reflected the ongoing conflict of the powers: mythological history is the reflection in human consciousness of the metaphysical struggle of the demiurges.

The dialectic of the *Potenzen*, which appears as the purely natural process of mythology, becomes the foundation for the interplay of the trinity in the supernatural event of revelation. The contrast between mythology and revelation is not that a different God dominates them, but that in mythology

'in the division of His powers, God is posited outside His own divinity, exoterically; he relates to Himself as mere nature; (in revelation) however, in the unity of His powers, He is known esoterically, in His true character as divine, as supernatural.'<sup>45</sup>

For Schelling, revelation presupposes hiddenness, and the history of mythology is the history of God's hiddenness. The human consciousness which receives revelation is already remote from the state of nature, prepared for it by the long process of quasi-divine dialectic. If a religion is possible which is to be more than a purely rational relationship to an *être suprême*, then we must posit some kind of primal, pre-rational link between man and God, an original God-positing faculty in the human consciousness:

'only such a natural God-positing principle, through which man is primally bound and committed to the God that precedes all thought and knowledge, will explain this naturally self-generating religion, i.e. mythology'<sup>46</sup>

Such a natural facility must be a presupposition for revelation and it overrides any absolute distinction between mythology and revelation. Rejecting a simple dichotomy of rational and revealed religion, Schelling suggests two types of religion stemming from man's fundamental 'God-positing' faculty: 1. the natural positing of forms of God in mythology and 2. the receptivity to supernatural revelation, as well as two types related to human reason: 1. *Vernunftreligion*, which is ignorant of the historical religions, and 2. Schelling's own ideal of 'philosophische Religion', which represents a freely speculative interpretation of the significance and evolution of the historical religions. The distinctiveness of mythology and revelation becomes clear for Schelling from the vantage point of positive philosophy: they contain much more significant truths than rational religion because they represent the actual historical life of creative forces, whose evidence can be used to show that the *absolutes Prius* immanent in reason is in fact God. Rational religion, by contrast, has denied itself access to the living God by refusing to grant any validity to the evolving productions of the historical religions. It is left inside the circle of pure reason, which can formulate a notion of the highest being but never liberate this notion from logical necessity.

The philosophical dilemma which Schelling hoped to resolve was to suggest why God chose to create rather than not to create (and thus to answer the primal question: Why is there something rather than nothing?) while at the same time avoiding any implication that this act of creation was an expression of a divine need. Creation is something to which God is attracted as a possibility, as an inviting path to more explicit self-knowledge, but which has no necessary relationship to His own existence. Just as in his essay *Über die Quelle der ewigen Wahrheiten* Schelling speculated that necessary truths were related to God's necessary essence but not to the willing, conscious core of His existence, so he hoped to formulate a doctrine of creation which eschewed all arbitrariness and yet preserved divine freedom. Such a doctrine would give history a meaning related to divine action, while rejecting the thesis that the dialectic of history was the evolution of God's own life.

Positive philosophy, for Schelling, hopes to indicate the difference between necessity and divine free will by studying the behaviour of the three powers as portrayed in the history of mythology. These powers themselves are given existence only when God wills to differentiate the unity of His own essence. The hypothetical character of all existence, which depends on the will of a divinity who cannot Himself be described

in the same terms as other being, refutes the contention of those who identified God with *materia prima*:

'the idea of primal being as the residue remaining when existing things are stripped of all their particularity is not a necessary truth, as the disciples of Parmenides and Spinoza held it to be, but a relative one; since, if I wish to go to the limit of all thought, then I must recognize it to be possible that there could be nothing at all. The last question is always: Why is there anything at all? Why not nothing?'<sup>47</sup>

Abstract categories and concepts are not the source of reality, but rather themselves depend on 'an indubitable reality', whose activity may be understood through the medium of the three powers, which are the 'authentic roots, *archai*, of all that has come into existence'. Although these *Potenzen* can be compared to abstract causes and categories, their character as substantial forces is crucial to Schelling, since it is the foundation of his claim to have discovered the positive reality of the structure of creation and salvation history. Causes and categories are ultimately subjective abstractions characteristic of negative philosophy, unless the *Potenzen* are there for the philosopher to uncover in the historical experience of mythopoesis and revelation. The realization that these powers are phases of God's activity in creation ('all the relationships which that which transcends being and is prior to it can have to being') which eventually are revealed as the three persons of the trinity, is for Schelling a crucial step in the history of philosophy.

'since the immediate principles of being have been re-discovered in this manner, it finally becomes possible for philosophy to liberate itself from the merely subjective notion with which it has attempted to mediate everything up to now. This is without a doubt the greatest transformation that has taken place in philosophy since Descartes.'<sup>48</sup>

The existence which is prior to being, the absolute spirit, 'is without cause, He is simply because He is. But from that it does not follow, as some are in the habit of saying, that His existence is absolutely undemonstrable'.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, the methodology of positive philosophy, which traces the activity of this spirit in the three powers, is capable of demonstrating its existence *a posteriori*. The task of this philosophy is to relate the world to the creator as 'freely willed and posited, which is the only way that it could be rational being, a true *kosmos*'.<sup>50</sup> Positive philosophy must restrict itself to understanding the origin of the world in terms of divine freedom, since freedom is the only category that can be applied to God. Even His nature as spirit must not be thought of as binding Him. His absoluteness consists in utter self-sufficiency, which is the ground of his freedom.<sup>51</sup>

In the absolute spirit itself, the *Potenzen* have no real existence: the divine being is absolute unity. Yet the freedom of God allows for the possibility that this unity could become division, that the absolute – while reserving the foundations of its existence in self-sufficiency – could project its own essence in terms of the interplay of the *Potenzen*, which could become the creation of a being other than God:

‘it could only ever be the perfect spirit itself who could subject its own being to transformation and permutation: when this possibility rises out of nothingness, a tension pervades the whole and the potentiality, which has come forth in the first image is propagated onto all things . . . what up to then were only the images of the absolute spirit, which were identical to himself, become the possibilities of another being, a being distinct from his eternal existence.’<sup>52</sup>

The possibility of created being depends on God’s free decision to suspend the unity of his own essence, to allow it to divide into the three chief principles of being, whose own dialectic will dominate the process of creation. The three powers each represent a possible relationship of God’s existence to the world, and each of these relationships does occur, ultimately being interpreted as the relationship of the three persons of the trinity to human history. Yet their independent existence depends on God’s free choice: whether to initiate the development of created being or to remain in his own uniqueness as pure existence:

‘conceiving Himself as the unique and universal spirit, He becomes aware of Himself as the truly absolute, as a spirit bound to no form of existence, not even His own, as the one who remains unique and universal even in the division of the powers, and who is therefore absolutely indifferent *vis à vis* the two possibilities: whether to remain in the original undisturbed being or to go out into the being that is pervaded by tension and divided within itself. He becomes aware of Himself as indivisible even in this division, as utter unity, who precisely because of this unity is free to set this division in train.’<sup>53</sup>

God is free because He is ‘self-identical from all eternity’. Freedom, for Schelling, does not consist in perception of the necessity of a process and identification with it, but rather in the ability of the divine subject to choose between one or other alternative without any preference arising from need. The movement to creation, which presents the divine unity in terms of the three powers, is the result of God’s simple act of will, which transforms the utter *An sich* of his being into *ausser sich Sein*, His sheer act of existence, prior to all concretion, into something which ‘has being’, an *existamenon*. God’s transformation of His own ‘pre-conscious’ existence to a self-conscious, self-positing process, occurs through the medium of creation, in which the elements of being, the powers, operate. ‘The true motive of this procession (of God out of

himself) is therefore creation and this process must be represented as the process of creation.’<sup>54</sup> The separation of the powers in this creative process does not, for God, destroy what is divine in them. The process itself depends on God’s certainty that the powers can never be completely broken apart – their unity in the divine remains in essence, to be realized in fact with the fulfilment of creation. Both the powers and the created world which is their product achieve no ultimate independence from the divine essence:

‘what is authentic in them is still divine – what is not divine, that which makes them merely powers, is simply externality, is not essence but rather a mode of appearance. In the same way, if the world is the product of these powers, it too is not essence, but only appearance, albeit divinely posited appearance.’<sup>55</sup>

For Schelling, God’s free decision to create confirms His own Lordship over the world. Only positive philosophy grasps this freedom, because it avoids making God part of created being. Hegel’s rationalism, by contrast, emphasized the necessity of the act of creation and God’s dependence on created being:

‘The proposition ‘God is not God without the world’ has been given the following content in recent times: that He is not God, not absolute spirit, as it is said, without having evolved through nature, through the sphere of finite spirit. This proposition is the consequence of that misunderstanding in negative philosophy which I have often alluded to, which implies that God, i.e. the idea of God, has the world of nature and spirit as His presupposition.’<sup>56</sup>

God’s Lordship depends on his domination of the three powers, and would be confirmed even if the world had never been created, ‘even if he had kept the powers in himself for ever as mere possibilities’. Creation is not a process that God Himself is involved in ‘since he remains, as primal cause, external to it, elevated above the trio of causes (the *Potenzen*), as absolute cause, *causa causarum*.’ If the world is a product of God’s free act, and not an emanation of His nature, there must be an entity or force which mediates between the eternal nature of God and the act of creation. This force – which is the first power or ‘Father’ – is the possibility that emerges from God’s eternal *an sich*, which ‘from all eternity interrupts the unity of his being’. This power was known to the Greeks as the world-mother, to the Indians as *maja* and to the Hebrews as *hokhmah* or divine wisdom.

For Schelling, the purpose of fulfilling this possibility is God’s desire to create something other than Himself and to transform it into that which knows him. What seems, then, to be the utterly gratuitous act of God becomes a need for recognition, for a creature who will acknowl-



edge God's power and glory. Schelling speaks of this 'need' as 'unique in the otherwise need-less divinity',<sup>57</sup> but this limiting clause cannot hide the fact that any description of God's relationship to man in terms of need reveals the instability of Schelling's interpretation of creation as a process to which God is strongly inclined, while yet not necessitated.

The life of the second power or 'Son' is directly associated with created being, with that existence which is distinct from the divine nature. The Son's independence from the Father is achieved simultaneously with the Father's realization of the possibility of creation: 'The beginning of creation is at the same time the moment of the Son's birth, of his differentiation (from the Father).' The Son reaches divinity, genuine independence from the Father, only with the conquest of that in created being which is alien to God and with his gift of the world to the Father. Only then is the second power re-united with the Godhead. In the same way, the third power, or Spirit, only becomes divine when all of creation is mediated through it to the Father by the Son. It is the final cause of the whole process of creation, but it is known as God only at the fulfilment of the history of the world: 'in the state of tension, during the process, it is a demiurgic power like the Son, but in the restoration it is a divine personality.'<sup>58</sup> The process of creation achieves a union of the oneness of the Godhead with the multiplicity of possibilities generated by the powers. The divine unity is 'only realized at the end of the process, in the complete overcoming of what is external to God's self, in its return to identity with Him'.<sup>59</sup> In this limited sense, rather than in terms of necessity, the process of creation can be called theogonic:

'thus the complete realization or manifestation of the divinity — of the relationships which were present in it from all eternity — is achieved through this process. Only in this sense can the word 'theogonic' be used in reference to God.'<sup>60</sup>

For Schelling, then, the doctrine of creation is based on an application of the idea of the trinity, 'that the divine *Gestalten*, when directed outwards as powers, take on the nature and function of cosmic, demiurgic forces'.<sup>61</sup> Only this idea of the cosmic powers, which in the fullness of time evolve to divine persons, can explain the rise and fall of polytheism, and the truth that it contributes to human history.

Unlike all else in creation, man relates directly to God, not to the three powers. In his primal state, man is not a concrete result of the dialectic of the powers; he is himself *actus purus*. Only his contingency distinguishes man from God. Man, too, has Lordship over the demiurgic powers, but his Lordship, unlike God's, is limited by the imperative to preserve their unity, not to subject it to tension as God may do.

Man's fall was his attempt to dominate the powers, to be their Lord in their division as well as in their unity. This act of *hubris*, the attempt to be God in act as well as in essence, abolished man's conditional Lordship and left him under the external domination of the powers. Rather than relating to God, man was forced to worship the powers: that which was purity and unity in God becomes for man a dark, chaotic force. The first power, the Father, is present to man only as negativity, as anger and vengeance. The divine unity now becomes for man the opposition of good and evil, the effect of the conflict of the powers that he himself has set in train. The principle of matter, of substance, in creation, which God must win over to himself, becomes for man a dark, monolithic and oppressive force. The world in which man has committed this *hubris* is a world of externality, in which man has no centre of gravity, no principle of unity. For Schelling, the fall means that the world as it is is the result of man's desire to imitate God:

'in this sense Fiche is right: man does posit the world, it is he who has set up a world outside God, not just *praeter* but *extra Deum*. He can call this world his world. When he took the place of God and once again roused this principle (of matter become chaos) he set up a world outside God, taking it for his own. Yet this world, which he grasped for himself, is a world that has shed its glory, a world divided within itself, which is cut off from its true future and seeks its goal in vain. Generating the false time of mere appearance, it does nothing but repeat itself eternally in sad monotony.'<sup>62</sup>

Before the fall, God was fully immanent in creation: man's active attempt to recast the world of being in his own image first set up the world as *extra Deum*. Yet the character of the world as external to the divine is the condition of our own freedom. With the separation of the world from God, man has the possibility of striving beyond the world that surrounds him to the God that transcends the world.

It is left to man's free will to decide whether or not creation will remain within God or be set on the difficult path of the dialectic of the divided powers. This path will lead to the independent emergence of the Son and the fulfilment brought by the spirit. In the fall, then, man arrogated the rule of creation to himself and in doing so broke apart the unity of the three powers of being, whose dialectic would now dominate human consciousness. This dialectic was reflected in the history of religions in the polytheistic systems of mythology. Religion in this form is natural, because it does not any longer relate to the transcendent God, but only to His distorted image in the powers. Yet the mythopoeic process is theogonic in the sense that it is the means of restoring man's consciousness to its original character as *Gott setzende* ('God-positing'). God's will continues to guide the world, but after the fall the divine will

is present to man only as anger. Yet man's action was crucial for the liberation of the son from the father: the second power, the future Son, joins man in the state of alienation from God. Its work frees the human consciousness from the deathly power of God's anger and it strives to restore the world to God.

The whole process of mythopoesis is for Schelling the result of the most fundamental act of human freedom. The traditional doctrine of the Fall becomes for him the beginning of man's historical search for identity. The separation of man from his original identification with the divine initiates a world of struggle, but at the same time will ultimately make possible a free worship of God. With man's escape from his naive unity with the immanent divine revelation becomes possible, since revelation presupposes distance and dignity. The beginning of history is the beginning of the age of the Son, in whom God and man will finally meet in a higher, realized union:

'the disintegration which man brought about separated the Son from the Father and transformed his being into something that he has not from God or from the Father but from man, and which thereby sets him free from the Father.'<sup>63</sup>

The age of pagan mythology is the Son's 'age of suffering', but in the act of full revelation, which is based on all the achievements of mythology, the Son 'is once again made the Lord of being'.

Schelling's doctrine of the powers represented for him a means of overcoming Hegel's philosophy of necessity while at the same time providing some explanation why God chose to create. His philosophical intention was to abolish the notion of necessity as applied to God and yet to discover sufficient reason for creation. Creation, in his positive philosophy, was not the result of a totally arbitrary choice between identically desirable alternatives: it was rather the consequence of God's desire to apprehend His own essence through the process of exploration of the interplay of the constitutive powers of his own being, which are interpreted philosophically, from the Greeks onwards, as material, efficient and final cause. In creation, God saw his own existence given form and concretion. Man's act of *hubris* gave this differentiation within the divine a completely new character. Creation, once the concrete self-image of God, the evocation of His own possibilities, became the sphere of God's absence and anger. The powers of the divine essence, united in creation before the fall, broke apart in conflict in the world which man had attempted to dominate. Yet only the fall could give the Son independence from the Father. The task of restoring the world to oneness with the creator brought the Son to the fullness of divinity. The Son's struggle with God's negative power, his anger, is recorded in the history of pagan mythology: only when the son

has won his battle, only at the end of ancient history, can revelation itself begin. Its subject is the divine Son, the Lord of being.

### 3. THE PROCESS OF SALVATION AND SECULAR FREEDOM

For Schelling, revelation, like mythology, cannot be described in *a priori* rational terms, since it is the 'manifestation of the most free, indeed most personal, will of God'.<sup>64</sup> Pure reason could not have predicted that God could give man the power to put all His work in jeopardy, nor that he would freely overcome the domination of the world by the divided powers, restoring His creation to unity with himself. God's act of restoration was founded at the moment of the Fall itself: 'it is only natural to think that God conceived the idea of a restoration of being at the same moment as that being, on which He had staked everything, withdrew itself from him.'<sup>65</sup> Positive philosophy sees its task as the demonstration of God's freedom in revelation, while maintaining that his will can be interpreted *a posteriori*. The conquest of paganism by Christianity, the 'greatest of all revolutions', can only be understood if we grant that Christianity possessed to perfection the inner principle of paganism itself. It was the continuity of the forces at work in paganism and Christianity that allowed Christianity to so quickly undermine and replace the outward forms of the ancient religions. Christianity can only be understood in the context of that great system of religion of which it itself is 'indeed the highest and most sublime manifestation, yet still only the final and culminating part'.<sup>66</sup> The fundamental presupposition of revelation is 'a not merely ideal or rational, but rather a substantial relationship of the human essence to God',<sup>67</sup> and this can be achieved only through the history of mythology.

The transcendental history of being, the dialectic of the powers that he had already developed, provided Schelling with an interpretive background against which to study the nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus' nature and purpose becomes clear in the light of the knowledge already gained from mythology of 'a demiurgic personality, a power mediating creation, which at the end of creation realizes itself as the Lord of being, as a divine person'.<sup>68</sup> With the fall of man, the second power had the choice of leaving man to total destruction at the hands of God's anger, the first power, or of associating itself with the fallen world. In the history of pagan mythology, the second power, the future Christ, freely chose identification with the fallen world, achieving dominion over it and defeating the power of God's anger. Yet, with its hard-won dominion, the second power does not wish to remain iso-

lated from the Father to rule the world in its own right. For Schelling, the glory that the Son achieves independently of the Father is essential to an understanding of his self-sacrifice in the crucifixion. Christ's free act of giving his personal dominion over the world to the Father elevates him from the status of the second power to full divinity, it is 'the will not only to bring being back into union with his own essence, but also to offer himself as a sacrifice as the God outside God'. The self-subordination of the second person reconciled creation with the divine will, finally abolishing the power of God's anger.<sup>69</sup> With the conquest of the world, Christ returns to his original state of total identification with the will of the Father. It was the free character of Christ's act that made revelation itself a free process, while mythology, by contrast, was a necessary dialectic of the powers, ruled by the iron law of God's anger. In the world of God's absence, man is subject to cosmic necessity.

For Schelling, the age of the Spirit is 'the futurity that pervades all of creation, to which all things tend'.<sup>70</sup> Time is in three parts: the age of the Father is that before the Fall, the age of the Son is the history of mankind, and the age of the spirit is an ideal future. This future is no longer part of temporal reality, but of eternity. 'The spirit will come after time as the last ruler of creation in its perfection, creation returned to its origin, that is, to the Father.'<sup>71</sup> Human time is only a branch of absolute time, which is itself divided according to the free act of God in initiating the process of His own self-explication. In this context the activity of the second power becomes much more far-ranging than that of the historical Jesus. Schelling's doctrine of the powers introduces a radical separation of Jesus the man and the second power or person:

'the real content of Christianity is Christ Himself and His history, not the mere externality of His deeds and sorrows during the time of His visible humanity, but His higher life, in which His life as a man is only a moment of transition.'<sup>72</sup>

Schelling's interpretation of the role of the holy Spirit as restricted to an ideal future sheds light on his understanding of the significance of inner-worldly action. While for Hegel the spirit represented the universalization in space and time of the act of the incarnation, imparting to secular action a significance connected to God's own rise to self-consciousness, for Schelling all of history remains in the age of the second person. The redemption of the world through secular action under the aegis of the spirit is meaningless in a system which postpones the coming of the spirit to an ideal future. The history of man after the incarnation, which was for Hegel the history of man acting under the influence of the spirit to achieve self-liberation and self-consciousness, is for Schelling only a short, figuratively described appendix to his vast history of

mythology and discussion of the immediate events of the New Testament. In a system which attempts to grasp all of 'absolute time', which concentrates on the history of the ancient world as the true arena for the battle between God's anger and the second power, the history of modern freedom plays a small role indeed. Schelling's philosophy of mythology and revelation is a radical renunciation of any identification of God's purpose with man's attempts to construct a world of justice and freedom in his present, secular situation. It shifts our attention away from history after the incarnation, from the history of the Christian world, to the mythical and absolute time, in which, according to Schelling's trinitarian system, the crucial events of creation and salvation history were played out.

Schelling's emphasis on a future ideal union of man with God, of the redeemed world with a reconciled creator, contrasts strongly with Hegel's restriction of philosophy's interpretive role to the present. Schelling intended his philosophy of mythology and revelation to act as the foundation of a 'philosophical religion' that would be capable of restoring German national self-confidence and reinforcing the foundations of traditional religious and political life. The philosopher himself, who, because of his exalted calling, can be said to be already living 'in the islands of the blessed', does not require the dogmatic guidance of religious faith. He is guided by his own speculative freedom, his own higher powers of insight and interpretation. The philosopher is conscious of the elevated character of his role and willingly constructs a system of truth capable of guiding national culture towards integration and vitality.

For Schelling, the history of the Christian Church can be understood in directly trinitarian terms analogous to the succession of the three powers. The three epochs in its history are to be symbolized by the apostles Peter, Paul and John: Peter representing the principle of power and stability, Paul the freedom of the word and John the ideal spiritual future. Schelling criticized the Catholic church from a German Protestant nationalist standpoint, accusing it of involvement in and subordination to secular power. It was the Reformation which introduced a freedom into Christian history that overcame the Petrine exclusiveness of law. Yet Protestantism itself should recognize

'that it is only a transition or mediation, and has significance only in relation to the higher truth that it mediates. But because of this it does have a future that is denied to the fossilized Petrine church, which itself can finally reach this future only with the help of the Protestant church.'<sup>73</sup>

The resolution of the Petrine and Pauline principles, of law and freedom, will be an ideal unity of freedom and association, an eternal com-

munity, 'a unity sustained without any external force'.<sup>74</sup> The whole, final truth is to be found only in the future 'kingdom of the spirit', the age of the apostle John. This universal Church will be the resolution of faith and works, of grace and the law, of Jew and gentile.

'John is the apostle of the future and final universal Church of that second, new Jerusalem that he himself saw descending from heaven . . . which sustains itself without restriction, without external authority of any kind, since all approach it through personal conviction because their own spirit has found a home and an identity in it.'<sup>74</sup>

In this future Church Christianity will be the object of 'universal knowledge', offering a truth that all will spontaneously and totally identify with. The final worship of God will contain all the moments of the past, all the richness of the trinitarian development of the historical religions. It will no longer be dominated by warring schools of dogma, but will represent the highest and most universal wisdom: reason and faith will meet in a religion which represents the culmination of all philosophical attempts to interpret the origins and development of the world. Christianity and all its distorted predecessors represent the foundations of true rational science: it is their content that the thinker must seek to develop, rather than setting up new worlds of his own. The age-old truth of the *Potenzenlehre* is finally to be characterized as a transcendent order to which man's self-consciousness must conform, rather than as a portrait of his own evolution to freedom.

'Christianity has been prepared for from the foundation of the world: it is only the execution of the idea that was already implicit in the relationships of the creative powers (*Weltprinzipien*). Outside this order there is no salvation: we must reconcile ourselves to it and conform to it . . . No one can found any order of things than that which has been present from the beginning: we must deliver ourselves up to its necessary progression. We live in this definite structure, not in any of the abstract or universal worlds that we so gladly conjure up for ourselves by relating to the most universal characteristics of things rather than penetrating their real relationships. We cannot abolish the infinite past on which the present is built . . . The world is not otherwise, it is not formless and undefined, but enclosed in a very definite order.'<sup>75</sup>

The Church of the future will represent the final reconciliation of God and the world, the abolition of finitude and secularity in the fullest presence of the spirit. The life of the Church reflects the objective order of the trinitarian nature of God, as made concrete in history through mythology and revelation. What is central to Christianity is not free subjective piety, but rather the objective and official life of the Church – its festivals, rites and dogmas.<sup>76</sup> The Church is the expression in the

history of revelation of the conquest of the world by the son and of the coming of the age of the spirit. It is the vehicle which may eventually deliver man from the world of secularity. The world must be understood as the concrete form of the divine order: it is not a realm in which man may attempt to set up his own kingdom with the blessing of God. Once God recalls man to full union with the spirit, the world of human subjectivity and secular action falls away like an empty husk.

For Schelling, then, the Church is the sacred vessel of the divine order which will eventually liberate man from a fallen world, rather than the mediator of the incarnation to the secular world of human activity. Such an understanding of the Church, and of the relation between spiritual truth and secular activity, necessarily reduces the secular state to the role of the guardian of established order. The state, for Schelling, is 'the power of reason', a force which restricts and controls man's tendencies to anarchy. Its existence is the pre-condition for the formation of law and the background to individual life. The concept of person must be unintelligible without the ethical order developed by the state, since 'a person is a subject who admits responsibility for his own actions: yet outside an actually existing legal order there could be no imputation of responsibility, and thus no personhood.'<sup>77</sup> The foundations of the state are in that objective reason which is immanent in nature and the way of things, not in the subjective and artificial constructs of the social contract. Objective reason accepts natural inequality. The experience of the previous half-century demonstrated, for Schelling, that attempts to construct a state from subjective reason must fail. Increasing desperation drove the more radical of such subjective activists to admit that their projects were based on individual will alone, the product of a desire to transcend historical time and build a heaven on earth. The supra-individual reason which is the foundation of the state, through its involvement in the contingency of earthly events, necessarily has an association with the arbitrary institutional products of history. The relationship of reason to the world demands this, and it cannot be changed by the wishes of those who hope to build a 'pure kingdom of reason'. The dialectic of history, passing through natural monarchy and republican ideas, has arrived at the mature and stable form of self-conscious monarchy, which has force at its foundation and freedom as its product.<sup>78</sup>

For Schelling, the desire of the individual to realize a kingdom of reason over against the irrationalities of history cannot be satisfied by subjective political projects but only by an inner transcendence of the state and of secular history itself:



'all of us not only may but positively should achieve an inward transcendence of the state; each one of us should be an example of that independence of mind which, once it has become the property of the whole people, defends more powerfully against oppression than the glorified idol of a constitution, which even in the land of its origins has in some respects become a *fable convenue*.'<sup>79</sup>

Schelling recommends his youthful audience to eschew political activity in order to cultivate the arts of contemplation. For him, political life consists only in the administration of an imperfect and unsatisfying order, while philosophy can provide the ideal that the spiritual elite seeks:

'Most of you desire more to be ruled . . . than to rule, because you wish to preserve your leisure, wit and energy for other things, because you seek a higher good than those political wranglings which come year after year and lead only to party divisions, whose worst aspect is that they allow even the most incapable to win a name and a reputation. Forswear politics, because you, like Aristotle, see the first task of state as the provision of leisure for the elite.'<sup>80</sup>

The state is 'the intelligible order become actual', the permanent foundation of social life. The foundations of the state itself are beyond change and criticism. Its irreducible and stable character is the presupposition for the higher tasks of the human spirit: 'it is the foundation of life, not its purpose, it is the eternal, permanent and unquestionable starting point for the higher purposes of the spiritual life'.<sup>81</sup> To expend spiritual energy on changing the state itself is therefore not only useless, but also a grave threat to the true spiritual tasks that the unchanging state facilitates. The false idealism of political progressivism can only destroy the preconditions for an authentic union with the ideal. The task of the state is to render itself neutral,

'to become imperceptible, as nature is imperceptible, to provide the individual with peace and leisure, to be the means and stimulus for his achievement of a higher purpose. This is what the state should be: only in this sense can we speak of its perfectibility.'<sup>82</sup>

The freedom that the state gives the individual is a freedom that is exercised beyond and above the state, not within its own boundaries. It is an external association from which little can be expected other than a secure legal foundation for the life of the individual. The result of a desire to realize freedom within the state is the absorption of every individual's energies and leisure in fruitless and sterile political tasks. Schelling's political philosophy does not intend to elevate a 'self-conscious', historically established monarchy as the state's ideal form, even though it may be the best possible: the whole search for the ideal in the political and social world is for him 'apocalyptic enthusiasm'.<sup>83</sup>

For Schelling, the emphases of the positive philosophy had direct implications for political life. Just as philosophy itself must be concerned with the priority of existence over essence, of God's freedom over rational necessity, so in political life the substantial 'that' of national tradition must continue to be preserved from the encroaching zeal of the 'what' of subjective political reason:

'The thinking that gives greater weight to thought than to existence, to the 'what' than to the 'that', seems to me to be more than a particular phenomenon, but rather a general sickness of the whole German nation – a nation which, thanks be to God, has been armed with unshakeable self-confidence but which now, after having neglected the 'that' for a long, long time, is on the point of busying itself with the 'what' of a constitution.'<sup>84</sup>

Thus the rationalistic sterility of German philosophical life has given birth to the fruitless radicalism of politics, posing a grave threat to a nation that must continue to hold fast to the traditional sources of its strength. A nation that has reinforced the core of its collective existence may afford to make some adjustments to its institutions in accord with reason, but to proceed in reverse, to make the rational search for a constitution the priority, will result only in national disintegration. Concern with the rational qualities of institutions leads to differentiation and to the rule of the majority. The enduring substance of national life, by contrast, is always a unity, and this is in accord with the priorities of all of life, since 'in the great commonwealth that we call nature and the world, there rules a single 'that' which abjures all plurality'.<sup>85</sup> This unity has as its consequence the rule of the natural monarch over the mass of men who are incapable of unified purpose and over the philosophical elite who care not for politics 'since they do not freely concern themselves with human affairs, but rather consider themselves to be already inhabitants of the islands of the blessed'.<sup>86</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION: THE FATE OF SCHELLING'S POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

Schelling's doctrine of God was an attempted refutation of theories which saw the laws of reason, and the evolution of human self-consciousness, as the apex of God's own life. He attacked the humanism of the Hegelians by relating reason to God only as a 'necessary accident' and by treating modern European history only as a moment in 'absolute time'. Schelling understood the modern politics of freedom and reason, based on a continuing critique of tradition, to be the political expression of the philosophical error of ignoring the priority of cosmic order and pre-conceptual existence. His positive philosophy had attempted to

show that reason was, in some obscure sense, only contingently related to God's existence, and therefore that man's own existence was part of a world remote from the transcendent core of divine life.

The humanism of the young Hegelians, by contrast, derived its self-confidence from their belief that Hegel had demonstrated that human autonomy was the *avant garde* of God's own self-expression. Their rejection of the religious foundations of Hegel's thought had not reduced the force of their belief in human nature or human spirit as a creative and autonomous force, capable of building an order that possessed all the characteristics which the religious consciousness had bestowed on God. Schelling's philosophy attacked the philosophical origins of this belief by introducing a radical distinction between human reason and divine existence. Hegel's understanding of theogony had related the post-revolutionary political order to God's life, while Schelling postponed the age of the spirit to a distant future, characterizing it not as the permeation of secularity by the incarnation, but as the re-call of creation to oneness with the Godhead, necessarily the abolition of secularity.

Schelling had, indeed, emphasized the Promethean character of the Fall, its role in drawing the second person away from the Father and in freeing man from the domination of the original monotheism: yet this Prometheanism did not understand history as a form of God's life, but rather as a distortion of its substance from which the age of the spirit would release man. For Schelling, in contrast to Hegel, this note of Prometheanism does not become the foundation of a theory of secularity. While, for Hegel, man's autonomy is expressed most forcefully in the activity that leads to the formation of a secular rational state, free of Church authority and characterized by self-determination and free thought, for Schelling man's highest powers must be dedicated to interpreting a divine order that exists independently of human will and activity. Whereas, for Hegel, the Fall leads to the independent spiritual validity of the secular world, for Schelling it is ultimately overcome by man's re-absorption in God in the Johannine age of the spirit. For Schelling, the freedom that the Fall gave man was the freedom to cast new images of the divine, to grow towards revelation: the evolution of man was evolution towards a spiritual union with the triune God, a union which took place in abstraction from the secular world.

Schelling's positive philosophy rejected both Hegel's version of theogony and political humanism for the same fundamental reason: God's life transcended human reason and secular experience. Man could become aware of it only by abstracting himself from the insignificance of history and the superficialities of everyday reason: only the philosophical elite, by a sensitive interpretation of the symbols of mythology and

revelation, could revive religious and national life by the communication of spiritual truth. The connection, for Schelling, between positive philosophy and German national vitality was in positive philosophy's avoidance of any association of human reason with divine necessity and its stress on the sheer fact of national tradition as itself superior to any artifice of political reason. Schelling's analysis of Hegel's philosophy sided with the Young Hegelians against the Old Hegelians, yet drew opposite conclusions. For Schelling, Hegel's rationalism could not make any sense of the two key notions of divine personality and of man's individual immortality. His direct association of man's self-liberation with the rise to self-consciousness of the divine had left the way open for a humanism that was prepared to abolish national tradition in favour of its own subjective idealism.

Schelling's 'Promethean' concept of man was limited to his vision of human maturation as dependent on a refusal to be dominated by an oppressive and monolithic divine power – it was never expressed in political terms. For Schelling, there was no historical connection between the event of the incarnation and the development of freedom in social and political life. Christianity was a doctrine which could provide a key to the interpretation of divine life, the final synthesis of those spiritual forces that had characterized all religious experience. Its significance consisted in the depth of its revelation of the divine essence: this revelation could be interpreted by the philosopher, woven together with his own metaphysical insights, and presented to the people as the foundation of religious life. For Schelling, Christianity was the fullest revelation of an eternal, spiritual truth which had also been expressed by the ancient mythologies. Man's secular existence bore no vital relationship to this truth, just as the meaning of Christianity transcended any historical events. Christianity was not, for Schelling, a new relationship of God to man that must affect all aspects of human existence, but the fullest expression of an age-old doctrine that the philosopher was called upon to grasp and to re-interpret, passing it on to the unphilosophical masses as the core of their spiritual existence. Schelling's greatest hope, in formulating the positive philosophy, was to answer the riddle of being itself, to find the solution to the question: Why is there anything at all? Why not nothing? To understand Christianity pre-eminently as a doctrine providing an answer to this question was to put it at a remote distance from the problems of secularity and human autonomy. The answer to this question, the essence of divine truth, lay for Schelling only in a realm abstracted from the corrupted realities of secular existence.

Schelling's late philosophy was intended to provide the spiritual resources for a re-generation of German cultural and political life. It hoped to fulfil the three conditions for true religion that Hegel had for-

mulated in the Tübingen *Stift* and which the young Schelling had also endorsed: fantasy, rationality and community.<sup>87</sup> The element of fantasy was provided by the demonstration of the unity of Christianity with all the aesthetic creativity of the mythologies of the ancient world; the element of rationality by Schelling's attempt to link a theory of the categories of being to the doctrine of the trinity through his *Potenzenlehre*; and the element of community in Schelling's nationalistic emphasis on the traditional substance of German culture in opposition to Enlightenment rationalism:

'In Germany the fate of Christianity will be decided; the German people is recognized as the most universal; for a long time, too, it was known as the greatest lover of the truth, as a people that had sacrificed everything, even its political importance to the truth.'<sup>88</sup>

The positive philosophy, if only through Schelling's sheer longevity, represented the survival of Romanticism beyond the death of Hegel, its confrontation with the philosophers of atheistic humanism, and its re-formulation as a critique of rationalist philosophy of religion. Much of the young Hegelians' hostility to Schelling derived from their awareness that he had once been an arch-exponent of Romanticism and that he had the encouragement of the Prussian King to initiate a revival of Romantic themes in politics, religion and philosophy.

Among the radical Hegelians, it was the young Engels who made the most thorough attempt to understand and criticize Schelling. After making an admirable summary of the basic tenets of the positive philosophy, Engels attacked Schelling from the point of view of a Hegelianism interpreted in the light of the work of Strauss, Feuerbach and Bauer. For Engels, the basis of Schelling's philosophy was nothing more than 'gnostic oriental dream thinking, which conceives every thought category either as personality or as matter'.<sup>89</sup> Engels contrasted Schelling's stress on the *a posteriori* with the 'good, naive Hegel with his belief . . . in the right of reason to enter into existence, to dominate being'.<sup>90</sup> For Engels, Schelling's depiction of the process of creation remained quite arbitrary and undialectical: 'one fails to see the necessity for the whole thing, it remains obscure why the power takes leave of its lovely potential peace, subjects itself to being, etc.'<sup>91</sup> In Schelling 'the confusion of freedom and arbitrariness is in full flower'.<sup>92</sup> Schelling's philosophy sacrificed the dignity of the science of reason for the sake of becoming Christian, but Engels doubted whether it could be called so, since 'the Christian God is one who has been complete from all eternity, whose composure suffers no change even through the Son's temporary life on earth'.<sup>93</sup>

Rather than parading his positive philosophy, Schelling should have

brought to Berlin a Christian refutation of Strauss' *Leben Jesu* or Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*: only thus could he have fully participated in the intellectual struggles of the age. For Engels, the pity of the aging Schelling's debacle lay in his failure to realize the achievements of his youth, which had brought nature into fruitful contact with abstract thought. It was Feuerbach who had re-discovered and developed the relationships between reason and nature, fulfilling the promise of the young Schelling, while Schelling himself 'left the road of pure thought, buried himself in mythological and theosophical fantasies and kept his system at the disposal, as it would appear, of the King of Prussia, for at his call the never completed was at once ready.'<sup>94</sup>

The young Marx, too, insisted on the affinities between the thought of the young Schelling and the work of Feuerbach. As editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* Marx was forbidden by the censor to include any articles against Schelling. As he wrote to Feuerbach: 'Schelling is the thirty-eighth member of the German Federation. The whole Prussian police force stands at his disposal.'<sup>95</sup> To their great disappointment, Ruge and Marx had discovered that the French social and political radicals were by no means anti-religious and that a true Franco-German journal was impossible because of the continuing devotion of the French to religious and romantic thought. It was Schelling who was to blame for much of this, and thus, in the eyes of the young Hegelians, for the destruction of their dream of Franco-German unity on radical philosophical and political principles. The most pressing philosophical task, then, was an attack on Schelling, and, for the young Marx, no one was better suited to it than Feuerbach:

'For Pierre Leroux and those like him Schelling is still the man who replaced transcendental idealism with rational realism, the abstract idea with an idea of flesh and blood and scholasticism with a philosophy of the world . . . An attack on Schelling is, therefore, an indirect attack on our political situation and especially on Prussia. Schelling's philosophy is Prussian politics *sub specie philosophiae* . . . You are just the man, because you are the inversion of Schelling. The brave ideas of Schelling's youth . . . which, with him, remained only a fantastic youthful dream, have in you become truth, reality, achieving manly seriousness . . . I consider you then the necessary and natural opponent of Schelling, summoned to the task by their Majesties nature and history. Your struggle with him is the struggle of the fantasy of philosophy with philosophy itself.'<sup>96</sup>

Feuerbach replied, however, that he considered there was little need for an attack on such an absurd philosophy: 'To make a critique of Schelling, i.e. to unmask him . . . is not a scientific necessity, but only a political one.'<sup>97</sup> For Feuerbach, Schelling's *Potenzenlehre* was only a 'modern and castrated' version of Böhme's mystical teachings on 'nature in God'.<sup>98</sup> The dark ground of God's being that Schelling

spoke about was not mystical, pre-conceptual utter existence, but simply matter itself. Schelling's obscurities were no more than a confused presentation of the polarity between spirit and matter.<sup>99</sup>

The intention of Schelling's positive philosophy was to develop a philosophy of religion that could free God's existence from dependence on the work of pure reason. It was a re-affirmation of divine transcendence, of the distinction between the system of coherence that the human mind could set up in relation to the world of contingent existence and an utterly necessary being. Schelling sought to show that reason is grounded in God's simple act of existence: that reason's laws are secondary to the divine nature and thus never capable of leading to any conclusion that could prove His existence. For Schelling, reason could only suggest to us what consequences the *absolutes Prius* might have in created being. If these consequences were seen to be, in fact, the case, then, through the processes of 'metaphysical empiricism', the coincidence of the divine person and the *absolutes Prius* of pure reason could be inferred.

Historical evidence, then, became an essential part of the proof not only of the truth of Christianity but also of the existence of God. Yet the type of evidence Schelling chose and the interpretive methods he used rendered the project of a positive philosophy of religion infertile. The substance of the proof for the existence of God from the history of religious experience was, for Schelling, in ancient mythology: yet the attempts of the earlier romantics to establish an ancient unity of religion were unconvincing, and Schelling's own approach to the problem was much more tendentious than that of Görres or Creuzer. Schelling's stress on the *a posteriori* character of positive philosophy, with a receptiveness to experience and a stress on facticity which he contrasted with Hegel's elucidation of the movements of the pure notion, was inconsistent with his own study of the ancient mythologies. He rejected the attempts of scholars like Creuzer to demonstrate historical links between the mythologies as hopeless and irrelevant. The similarities between the various systems of mythology could be explained, for Schelling, by reference to the schemata of his own *Potenzenlehre*, and not by empirical research into historical influences.<sup>100</sup> By his fanciful application of the *Potenzenlehre* to disparate bodies of ancient myth, Schelling did no more than impose a pre-conceived system of metaphysical categories on a mass of empirical data which itself provided no justification for it.<sup>101</sup> The Romantic study of myth had, two decades before Schelling's presentation of his positive philosophy, progressed beyond the dreams of Schlegel and the heroic labours of Görres and Creuzer. K.O. Müller's *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology* (1825), while inheriting the insights of Romanticism into the uniqueness of myth as the product of a pre-philosophical consciousness,

demonstrated a sophisticated use of analytical methods that made impossible any belief in an ancient unity of myth. By a study of the origins of particular Greek myths, Müller was able to show that the first form of a myth was often very localized:

'in order to reduce the mythus to its original form, we must always subject it to a treatment the converse of that which it received from the ancients. Now it is a thing quite unquestionable that during antiquity the tendency prevailed to unite traditions, for the purpose of forming them into connected wholes. We have, therefore, first of all, to dissolve and destroy this connection.'<sup>102</sup>

Schelling's claim to be able to demonstrate the essential unity of all ancient mythologies through the *Potenzenlehre* showed less receptiveness to the complexities of historical experience than Hegel himself had exercised in his *Philosophie der Geschichte*, despite Schelling's claim to be working *a posteriori*. Similarly, Hegel had attempted to relate his philosophy of religion to the experience of worship and spiritual communion of the *Gemeinde*, while Schelling formulated his *Potenzenlehre* in abstraction from actual Christian practice.<sup>103</sup> Schelling's *Potenzenlehre* was little more than a new form of the trinitarian thought characteristic of German idealism. It had no more independence from speculation than did Hegel's understanding of the divine nature. The 'positive' element in Schelling's thought seems to have been less the patient interpretation of the evidence of religious history than a rehearsal of themes derived from the history of mysticism and gnosticism. His philosophy of mythology and revelation did not provide the alternative to a purely rational philosophy of religion that he had sought. It was the young Kierkegaard who first noted that Schelling's last philosophy put the exciting promise of a radical departure from Hegelianism side by side with the fantasies of the *Potenzenlehre*. Kierkegaard recorded his enthusiasm at Schelling's talk of 'reality' but soon came to the conclusion that the theory of potencies betrayed only Schelling's own impotence:

'The fact that philosophers talk about reality is often just as deceptive as when a man reads a sign-board in front of a shop "Ironing done here". If he should come with his linen to get it ironed, he would be making a fool of himself, for the sign-board was there only for sale.'<sup>104</sup>

Schelling's achievement lay in his belief in the possibility of an understanding of God's relationship to the world and to human reason which could transcend Hegelian rationalism, and his attempt to develop this belief into a comprehensive critique and system.<sup>105</sup> For Schelling, if the truth of God as sublimely independent of his own creation was to be affirmed, then a rational derivation of God's existence had to be supple-



mented by a study of the concrete conditions of human existence, of the world of God's creative actions. Since reason had become aware of the gap between its own processes and the living God, then knowledge of his existence might be derived from the complex of man's emotional and spiritual experiences in the context of daily life. This form of 'positive philosophy', of 'metaphysical empiricism' characterized the life and work of Kierkegaard, and was further developed by Heidegger. Schelling's philosophizing had emphasized both the religious need to relate to a living, personal God rather than to a highest *Vernunftidee* and as well the philosophical task of formulating a notion of being that would be radically distinct from the created beings of the world, a *Sein* that was never reducible to *Seiendes*. It was Kierkegaard who attempted to fulfil the first of these tasks, Heidegger the second.<sup>106</sup>

Schelling's project was to discover the limits of a science of pure reason in relation to God and to explore the possibility of a new kind of philosophy of religion. This new philosophy would examine the religious history of mankind, studying the primal structure of myth and revelation: an interpretation of this structure could demonstrate that the conceptual possibilities associated with an absolute *a priori* were in fact living realities. This demonstration, for Schelling, was not a once-for-all proof, but a constantly accumulating process. Such a procedure is in some respects similar to the approach of much contemporary theology and philosophy of religion: conceptual demonstration of the existence of God may show the coherence of the notion of a supreme being but not the necessity of its existence. Belief in God is an act of faith occasioned by an interpretation of experience, whether historical or personal, as revealing God's active and saving presence. Such an interpretation is a cumulative process, a journey of faith.

Yet Schelling himself continued to hold that negative philosophy, or pure reason, was able to intuit the existence of an absolute *a priori*. It was only in the transition from this absolute *a priori* to the living God that positive philosophy was to play its crucial role. To this extent Schelling remained firmly in the idealist tradition, but at the same time made the status of his 'positive philosophy' problematic, since it was the notion of an absolute *a priori* itself which was the crucial presupposition of theistic philosophy and which was most firmly rejected by the Young Hegelians. The existence or possibility of any absolute was to become the fundamental issue distinguishing atheistic and Christian humanism. The relationship between the absolute and the Christian God was of importance only in the short-lived controversy between Schelling and the orthodox Hegelians. Further, Schelling understood the 'positive philosophy' explicitly as philosophy rather than as an explication of faith: the structure of myth and revelation was to provide philosophical, rational knowledge of God, since the *Potenzenlehre* proposed an

identity of primal philosophical categories and the demiurgic or trinitarian forces of creation. Like Hegel, Schelling asserted the possibility of a knowledge of God's nature which did not depend on faith. Thus although Schelling's late philosophy sought to relativize the power of pure reason, it remained in crucial respects a rationalist philosophy of religion.<sup>107</sup>

In rejecting Hegel's system, Schelling had emphasized the priority of divine existence over divine nature as the only means of guaranteeing divine freedom. An 'essence' or 'nature' could be demonstrated by conceptual reasoning, but a God who was primordially free existence could be known only through positive philosophy's study of his free acts in the religious history of mankind. Yet Schelling's emphasis on the need for a 'positive' source of knowledge of God threatened to have exactly the consequence for man in society that the young Hegel had described in *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*. Since God did not reveal himself by rational necessity, but rather out of a liberty of indifference, then the world-order was factuality rather than rationality and man was constrained to accept this factuality. Since God was present in the world only in division, man could not relate to God within secularity. In Schelling's late philosophy, the determination to preserve the freedom of God as subject becomes the acceptance of world history as a positive 'fact' to which the human subject must conform. While God's decision to create is a free act, the process of divine life after the Fall unfolds as a transcendent cycle which is beyond the influence of the human subject. Thus the political consequences of Schelling's late philosophy were an acceptance of traditional authority and a recommendation to the intellectual elite to withdraw out of the public sphere into an interior world of esoteric knowledge.

## CHAPTER 5

INDIVIDUALISM AND RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE  
IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

## 1. THE CRITIQUE OF HISTORICAL IMMANENTISM

a. *In Ethics*

Kierkegaard's fundamental objection to the philosophy of Hegel and to the world-view of Hegel's disciples in Germany and Denmark was his rejection of the doctrine of immanence, the thesis that the absolute reveals itself both in the events of history and in the structure of created being. His own analysis of the significance of Christianity for the individual was an attempt to undermine the self-confidence of speculative reason and to lay bare the false pretences of historicism. For Kierkegaard, the work of Christianity, the highest stage of human existence, was its liberation of the individual from the rule of two idols, history and the collective. Neither of these had any authentic role to play in the task of becoming a Christian, and both had attempted to exercise a fatal domination over the individual, cutting him off from the true sources of grace. For Kierkegaard, the attack on history and the collective was a unity, since all groups or collectives are historically formed and all justify their importance through the significance of their historical role. The group, claiming unity with the divine life of history, with the subterranean current released into the human world by the incarnation, can have no meaning apart from a particular view of the historical process — the view that sees this process as the working-out of the deeds of Jesus, the concretization of his spiritual ideas in inner-worldly institutions. For Kierkegaard, to reject the importance of the historical process, to attempt to create an immediate unity between the individual believer and the person of Christ as he was as a suffering mortal, involved the rejection of the claims of all those groups that derived their own importance from their continuity with the incarnation or their proclaimed adherence to aspects of Christ's teaching.

Although rejecting Hegel's absolute, the Young Hegelians had retained his fundamental emphasis on the historical process; indeed, the elimination of any notion of the divine made the realization of purely human *Geist* (Bauer) or of the human *Gattungswesen* (Feuerbach) all

the more important. For Kierkegaard, this concentration on history as the ground of divine self-elaboration or of human evolution was epitomized by the works of Hegel's Danish disciples, thinkers related to the Old Hegelian theologian Marheineke rather than to the atheistic radicals, but the attack Kierkegaard made on these doctrines could be applied equally well to Hegel himself and to the Young Hegelians.<sup>1</sup> The goal that both Hegel and the Young Hegelians had attempted to derive from history was a type of ethical community, which would be the culmination of history as well as the fulfilment of human nature. Yet, for Kierkegaard, their understanding of history and historical development as the foundation for such ethical community reduced their thought to the status of the subethical, aesthetic stage of existence, albeit the 'reflective aesthetic'.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to understand human spiritual possibilities as dependent on the contemporary results of the historical process must, for Kierkegaard, introduce an element quite alien to ethics.

At the basis of Kierkegaard's critique of what he called 'world-historical speculation' was his understanding of ethics as grounded in human subjectivity. His critique of Hegel's historicism in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* was made under the sub-title 'The conclusion that would be forced upon ethics if the attainment of subjectivity were not the highest task confronting a human being'.<sup>3</sup> For Kierkegaard, the danger for the ethical individual involved in the speculative understanding of history developed by Hegel is that it depends on the choice of what has and what does not have historical significance, and that this choice depends on a quantitative rather than on an ethical dialectic:

'As a consequence of this fact, the absolute ethical distinction between good and evil tends for the historical survey to be neutralized in the aesthetic-metaphysical determination of the great and significant, to which category the bad has equal admittance with the good. In the case of what has world-historic significance, another set of factors plays an essential role, factors which do not obey an ethical dialectic: accidents, circumstances, the play of forces entering into the historic totality that modifyingly incorporate the deeds of the individual so as to transform them into something that does not directly belong to him. Neither by willing the good with all his strength, nor by satanic obduracy in willing what is evil, can a human being be assured of historical significance . . . How then does an individual acquire historical significance? By means of what from the ethical point of view is accidental. But ethics regards as unethical the transition by which an individual renounces the ethical quality in order to try his fortune, longingly, wishingly, and so forth, in the quantitative and non-ethical.'<sup>4</sup>

The speculative contemplation of the historical process, of the realm of accident, introduces for Kierkegaard a peculiar type of immorality, a cowardliness that refuses to be satisfied with the ethical status of in-

dividuality and insists on joining the historical process by forming a group, to figure in the quantitative dialectic by becoming an agglomeration large enough to attract the attention of the Hegelian philosopher of history. Besides depriving ethics of its fundamental union with the individual, 'world-historical speculation' introduces an unhealthy concern for the results of historical action, results that, because they are beyond the control of the individual — since a myriad of forces impose themselves upon his action once it leaves his hands — are irrelevant to his ethical status. Since, for Kierkegaard, it is false to speak of groups as ethical agents, since they lack subjectivity, and since only groups can make any sort of claim to achieving the desired goal of their historical actions, then the concern with results becomes irrelevant to ethics. A theory of historical progress, which must depend on these results and their significance, can receive no support from ethics, nor can it claim to have discovered the possibility of the ethical evolution of man as a parallel to the evolution of civilization. Neither the simple form of the theory of progress elaborated by the eighteenth-century *philosophes* nor Hegel's dialectical attempt to interpret the cunning of reason can absolve themselves, for Kierkegaard, of the charge of concentrating on events whose significance is derived from a quantitative dialectic. To understand the meaning of history as exhausted by these significant events, to restrict God's involvement with history to the schemata of the 'system of immanence' is to posit a divine wastefulness, relegating the lives of countless millions to insignificance.<sup>1</sup> The only philosopher capable of understanding the ethical significance of the historical process is God himself. The judgement of historical events can only have ethical status once the quantitative dialectic is replaced by infinite knowledge, insight into the secrets of conscience. For Kierkegaard, the 'reality of the world-historical evolution is not denied, but reserved for God and eternity, having its own time and place'.<sup>6</sup>

The understanding of history as the book of providence, legible to the human eye, is allied, for Kierkegaard, to the false claims of the group by the theory that each age had a definite world-historical task to fulfil, a task to be undertaken by the union of individuals in an historical entity capable of conforming to the quantitative dialectic. The notion of the 'needs of the age' becomes the 'demands of the age' and makes of the ethical a requirement that can only be discovered by the study of history, rather than the essence of subjectivity, available to all by introspection. Such a false doctrine must accompany the theory of progress, or any 'system of immanence', since the achievements of the past point to the characteristic needs of the present: that

‘the ethical first finds its concrete embodiment in the world-historical and becomes in this form a task for the living. The ethical is thus not the primitive, the most primitive of all that the individual has within him, but rather an abstraction from the world-historical experience.’<sup>7</sup>

The past can provide no clues on how to live – on the contrary, concern with the past, with the contemplation of pastness as such, can only dry up the springs of ethical action in the individual.

For Kierkegaard, the key to ethical action is intention, an element that must always be excluded from the world-historical, which necessarily deals with results alone. Yet this ethical intention is self-sufficient – historical significance is something that may be added to some historical events by providence. To identify providence with the significant results of the historical process is to deny God’s sovereignty, a sovereignty that relates to each individual as an ethical agent irrespective of his role in the schemata of the ‘system of immanence’:

‘the possibility relationship which is the inspiration of the ethicist in his joy over God, is God’s freedom, which when properly understood can never in all eternity become identical with the systematic immanence of the world-historical process, either before or after.’<sup>8</sup>

Against the notion of an objective task, proposed by the needs or demands of the age, to be tackled with the unified powers of the group, Kierkegaard proposes the task of becoming subjective. Such a preference is implied for him by the impossibility of defining oneself by the age and at the same time attempting to hold it in check, to mold it according to ethical priorities. Man is either the unfree product of the historical process or his actions derive their significance apart from its thrust. The ethical individual, involved in the task of becoming subjective, must learn first of all to strengthen the powers of his own will, while at the same time becoming more and more oblivious to the historical effects of his actions, since these have no ethical significance. This ethical enthusiasm, rather than identifying God’s activity with human history in the manner of the ‘system of immanence’, must deepen man’s awareness of himself as an ‘unprofitable servant’.<sup>9</sup> The contemplator of the historical process is incapable of understanding the significance of a life lived in total social isolation, a dialogue between God and the individual, which is at the same time capable of generating enormous ethical passion, ‘so that half the effort might suffice to transform an entire contemporary generation’.<sup>10</sup> For Kierkegaard, the temptation to accept the commensurability of the inner and outer, the false basis of the ‘system of immanence’ intensifies as a person grows older, but must be constantly resisted. Involvement with worldly events as possessing crucial significance must be suppressed by the cultivation of a sense

of the infinite, by the isolation of the individual in his God-relationship, the development of a 'true hypertension of the infinite in the spirit of man' that becomes the feat of infinite resignation.<sup>11</sup>

Since ethics is inwardness, it is the more clearly perceived the smaller its location: the individual conscience is the ideal ground of ethics, and life's true task, the task of becoming subjective, is the cultivation of this ethical inwardness, eliminating as far as possible all the pressures of history and the group. Such an attitude encourages an ethical sobriety, a realism about the possibilities of individual action that does not lust after 'the banquet table of the world-historical'.<sup>12</sup> Since the purpose of history is not in the patterns surmised by historiosophers, but rather in the cultivation of the God-relationship of each individual, even the most isolated individual preserves his unity with the rest of mankind through the ethical, since the 'ethical is the very breath of the eternal'.<sup>13</sup> In dedicating himself to the ethical as a task which has no relation to the study of history, and which draws no conclusion about the 'needs of the age', the subjective individual pledges himself to a higher certainty, since 'to concentrate upon the ethical yields the only knowledge which may not possibly in the last moment transform itself into an hypothesis'.<sup>14</sup> This is because the attempt to draw conclusions from the study of the world-historical suffers from the same weakness as any union of empirical and ideal: all such attempts can only be approximations, in no sense approaching the certainty open to the subjective individual. To found one's ethical resolutions upon a particular interpretation of history is to give the approximations of historical study quite inappropriate weight:

'knowledge of the world-historical is, as a cognitive act, an approximation, subject to the dialectic involved in every conflict between the ideal and the empirical, a dialectic which threatens every moment to prevent a beginning, and after a beginning has been made threatens every moment a revolt against this beginning.'<sup>15</sup>

The unstable union of fact and theory that constitutes any notion of the 'needs of the age' is, for Kierkegaard, as uncritical about its own presuppositions as it is lacking in any attempt to define the relationship between the individual and the race. By eliminating the role of subjective ethical intention in history such speculation eliminates ethics itself, since the ethical is based on this intention, which is itself the product of the unique relationship of each individual to God. Against the restriction of God's work to a historical framework, Kierkegaard sets up the 'complicity with God' of each individual involved in discovering his own life-task, which can never be objectively prescribed by the age. Rather than setting a distinct outward task for each individual, the duty of becoming subjective is boundless, coterminous with the span of life

itself: its end result must be to make each individual 'the very opposite of something in general'.<sup>16</sup> The 'needs of the age' pale into insignificance before the eternal tasks of the subjective individual, his duty to prepare himself for death and to concentrate on the prospect of immortality. For Kierkegaard, the obsession with history is a dissipation of essential forces, forces that must be concentrated on deepening the individual's inwardness, building the foundation on which all ethical decision is made. By liberating himself from the imagined demands of history, the individual gives himself the opportunity to discover the infinite sources of the ethical in God, to intensify his direct relationship with the Lord of history.

### b. *In Religion*

For Kierkegaard, then, the attempt to derive meaning from history, so far from transcending the ethical subjectivity of the individual, is on a distinctly inferior plane. Historiosophical speculation remains on the level of the aesthetic, since the categories it deals with are aesthetic – greatness, drama and power. But the ethical stage itself, although capable of freeing the individual from slavish dependence on history and the collective's interpretation of it, must eventually collapse. In its pure form, the ethical 'reposes immanently in itself and has nothing outside itself which is its *telos*'.<sup>17</sup> Ethics denies that man must accept historical evil as a necessary factor in his behaviour, bravely proclaiming the self-sufficiency of its own ideal. Yet ethics' superiority is also its undoing. History is a witness to the elusiveness of its goal: ethics

'points to ideality as a task and assumes that man is in possession of the conditions requisite for performing it . . . it develops a contradiction, precisely by the fact that it makes the difficulty and the impossibility clear.'<sup>18</sup>

Ethics must discover that sin is not the casual property of the isolated individual, but something that is upon examination seen to recede deeper and deeper, revealing itself as universal. Finally, ethics must admit its failure to exhaust the needs and possibilities of human nature. Its collapse in the face of the sheer mass of historical sin calls for the work of a new science, a science which, like history, attempts to grasp the reality of human nature. The Hegelian philosophy of history had abandoned ethics by using the quantitative dialectic, but it had an openness to historical reality, an ability to understand the role of evil in human history, that the pure ethical system lacked. Transcendence of the ethical stage could be made possible only by a science that had the



same openness to historical reality, but which drew opposite conclusions from it, which was supra-ethical rather than sub-ethical. This is the science of dogmatics, whose content can be supplied by revelation alone: dogmatics relativizes ethics by introducing the notion of original sin. The first ethics foundered upon the sinfulness of the individual, which was seen to be the sinfulness of the race itself. A new ethics must attempt to construct a new ideality which takes into account the reality of sin in its historical dimension.<sup>19</sup>

For Kierkegaard, the notion of original sin derives from the fact that 'at every moment the individual is himself and the race. This is man's perfection, regarded as a state'.<sup>20</sup> Because of this link between the individual and the race, the 'sinfulness of the race acquires a history'.<sup>21</sup> The accumulating power of sin constantly increases the likelihood that each new individual will become involved in it, so that the fate of the race becomes also the fate of every individual. Kierkegaard's rejection of the attempt to find meaning in history clashes, in a certain sense, with his own understanding of the breakdown of ethics in the face of the reality of original sin. The varying attempts by Hegel and the Young Hegelians to discover meaning in history were made with the awareness that an ethics devoid of historical awareness could not stand up in the face of historical evil. Their attempt to discover in history a plan of man's dialectical self-liberation was made in the awareness of the power of evil and in the hope of a final resolution of those conflicts whose working-out had motivated the evolution of human nature. What, for Kierkegaard, was dogmatics, the higher realism of a religious understanding of human nature, which could relieve the intolerable burden on ethics by drawing on a transcendent realm of grace, was represented for Bauer and Hess by the speculative understanding of human history, which hoped to discover the seeds of a future resolution that did not need to depend on a frail ethical ideality but which was derived from the immense reality of historical experience, comprehending evil, suffering and ignorance. The claim that the doctrine of original sin was a necessary part of the final understanding of human nature which religion provides is related to the Hegelian and Young Hegelian claim that the student of history could fit the historical fact of evil into a larger dialectic of human history which ended in the achievement of total self-liberation. Kierkegaard could claim that such a dialectic could never be discovered, because only 'significant' events were caught in the net of history, but he could not assert that the understanding of history was irrelevant to the knowledge of the ultimate conclusion of human life, since no doctrine was more historical than the doctrine of original sin.

Although the Young Hegelians understood history as the dialectical evolution of finite *Geist* or of human nature, Hegel's own understand-

ing of this dialectic was based on the self-revealing activity of the absolute. The process of man's historical self-liberation, the 'progress in the consciousness of freedom', had begun with the union of the absolute with the stuff of human history in the incarnation. Hegel's concern with history as a source of meaning depended on the belief that the incarnation had begun a process that dominated human history and which manifested itself in the crucial steps along the road to authentic enlightenment. Kierkegaard's rejection of history as void of meaning depended, equally, on his understanding of the incarnation. For Kierkegaard, it was necessary to develop an understanding of the incarnation that could maintain and strengthen the individual's freedom from history. Hegel's union of reason and history, into which Christianity was incorporated as the crowning glory of all the historical religions and as the starting point of the dialectical development leading to the humanism of modern times, implied that the incarnation could be integrated into the structure of finite events. Sacred and secular history could not, for Hegel, be distinguished, since the work of the absolute was present in all of history as a continuum: specifically religious events were not essentially different from secular ones, but could only be said to represent a more intense involvement of the absolute with human history than otherwise. The union of sacred and secular history implied that a true understanding of the spiritual condition of human life could be had only by the comprehension of all its aspects: the condition of political freedom, of scientific knowledge, of cultural efflorescence, as well as of faith itself, were relevant to the judgement of man's cooperation with God in history. Christian faith did not possess a set of principles that had meaning only within a distinctively religious sphere, but rather shared the ideals of freedom and reason that must hold sway in culture and society. It was always relevant to ask whether the variety of religious faith in a country was out of step with its secular institutions, and to insist, as Hegel did, that Protestantism was the most appropriate form of Christianity for a rational society of free men.

For Kierkegaard, on the contrary, 'Christianity is not content to be an evolution within the total definition of human nature'.<sup>22</sup> His rejection of the union of sacred and secular history depended on his understanding of the incarnation and of the act of faith itself. Christ's intervention in world history and the individual person's response to him took place on a different plane to all other events. Since the incarnation was an absurdity and response to it necessarily irrational, the two could no longer relate to each other as any two historical events. The incarnation broke all the laws of nature and the response of the individual to it must break the laws of history: the act of faith was not the result of the mediation of the truth about Christ through an historical tradition, a believing community and all the cultural associations of history. It did

not depend on the vehicle of secular history in any sense: since Christ's coming into the world was a unique act, it must set up a 'historical' process unique to itself, a process by which the persons of any age were abstracted from their secular environment and placed in a position of contemporaneity with the redeemer – not with the resurrected Christ but with Christ as he was present on earth, the suffering servant, rejected and despised by the world.

The process of secular history was rendered irrelevant by the uniqueness of the incarnation, which was capable of direct encounter with the individual in any age, without the mediation of human culture. Because of this, Kierkegaard denied that the incarnation must have visible effects on the spiritual state of the world itself – the world as the subject and product of secular history. Since the incarnation communicated itself directly to the believer, the economy of grace needed no resort to history for its efficacy. Any attempt to see the working-out of the incarnation in secular events, any claim that the Kingdom of God was already visible *in nuce* in man's acts of self-liberation, made possible by the saving presence of the spirit in the world, must deny the unconditioned immediacy of Christ to the individual believer.

The ideal of contemporaneity was developed by Kierkegaard as part of a synthesis of concepts intended to substantiate his understanding of faith. The ideas of the 'instant', of the 'paradox', of the 'offense' and of 'contemporaneity' made up a presentation of the relationship between Christ and the individual that powerfully rejected the claims of speculative reason, the group and secular history. For Kierkegaard, one definition of faith was simply contemporaneity itself – the encounter with Christ was to

'see Thee in Thy true form and in the actual environment in which Thou didst walk here on earth, not in the form in which an empty and meaningless tradition, or a thoughtless and superstitious, or a gossipy historical tradition, has deformed Thee.'<sup>23</sup>

This contemporaneity was essential because Christ could indeed not be known as a historical person, as an item of history, because his nature, his existence was against the laws of history. To attempt to approach Christ through history was to deny his uniqueness as a historical absurdity. Faith in Jesus can never be a form of knowledge, since knowledge refers either to the eternal or to the historical, either to the truths of reason or the truths of fact. Yet Jesus was the union of an eternal person with an historical entity, and as such is an absurdity, beyond the reach of historical knowledge: 'No knowledge can have for its object the absurdity that the Eternal is the historical'.<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard's answer to the problem of the historical Jesus is to refer back the question as un-

answerable and irrelevant: his conclusion differed little from Bauer's, except that Bauer went so far as to deny even the historical existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth. Both Bauer and Kierkegaard insisted that the search for the historical Jesus did nothing to strengthen the foundations of Christian faith.

If Jesus was inaccessible to historical knowledge, then contemporaneity was the only possible approach to him. Immediate communication with Christ himself was infinitely more important than relating to the historical effects of his life in ecclesiastical institutions and theological reflection: 'seeing that he is God His life (the life which he actually lived in time) is infinitely more decisively important than all the consequences of it in the course of history'.<sup>25</sup> The period of time that has elapsed since Christ's death cannot add the minutest item to the impact of His own life on the believer:

'this interval, rather, all that this interval makes of Him, secular history and Church history, with all the worldly information they furnish about Christ . . . is a thing completely indifferent, neither here nor there, which merely distorts Him.'<sup>26</sup>

Christ is a paradox, existing only for faith, a faith which must decisively reject history as the vehicle of anything essential and perform a unique act of regaining contemporaneity with the living Jesus. The decision for faith must be made on the basis of the appearance of this Jesus as he lived, in the guise of a humble servant, still capable of evoking incredulity and hostility in the observer: to respond to Christ in his resurrected glory is already to become a part of history, to avoid the self-denying and austere act of contemporaneity.<sup>27</sup> To attempt contemporaneity is to avoid the temptation of looking for confirmation of Christ's divinity in the effects of His life in history. Such effects, for all their supposed cumulative power, can never supply the justification for the qualitative leap from natural to supernatural.

A Christianity that rests on knowledge of the consequences of Christ's life is one that has never fully encountered his human nature, his life in suffering. Belief in the effects of divine grace in history is a far simpler task than response to a living man demanding paradoxical allegiance:

'There is an endless yawning difference between God and man, and hence, in the situation of contemporaneousness, to become a Christian (to be transformed into likeness with God) proved to be an even greater torment and misery and pain than the greatest human torment, and hence also a crime in the eyes of one's neighbours . . . For in the relation to the absolute there is only one tense: the present. For him who is not contemporary with the absolute — for him it has no existence. And as Christ is the absolute it is easy to see that with respect to him there is only one situation: that of contemporaneousness.'<sup>28</sup>

The uniqueness of the incarnation is that it makes possible such contemporaneousness. The

'past as past lacks the determinant which is the determinant of truth (as inwardness) and of all religiousness, the *for thee*. The past is not reality — for me: only the contemporary is reality for me . . . and thus every man can be contemporary only with the age in which he lives — and then with one thing more: with Christ's life on earth; for Christ's life on earth, sacred history, stands for itself alone outside history.'<sup>29</sup>

If the claim to be Christian rests on the certainty of being heir to 1,800 years of Christian history, then, for Kierkegaard, it is null and void.

Kierkegaard's doctrine of contemporaneity depends on his rejection of the possibility of a communication of the incarnation through the medium of secular history. Such communication is possible only if sacred and secular history share, at some point or to some degree, in the same substance. But for Kierkegaard they are as dualistically conceived as Descartes' mind and matter. In the incarnation sacred and secular interact at an infinitesimal point. The paradox of a union of the historical and the eternal has no relevance to any other historical event: the eternal God did not irrevocably involve himself in the stuff of history, did not commit himself to a providence visible to the human eye, nor did secular events receive the task of expressing the saving work of the Redeemer. Because of this, the pattern of history since the life of Christ can tell us nothing about him, nor adduce any evidence for his divinity. Contemporaneity places the believer before the suffering Christ, stripped of all the riches of human culture, and calls upon him to make a response of utter simplicity and immediacy. In this sense, Kierkegaard saw himself as exposing the deepest needs of human existence in his analysis of the meaning of being a Christian: he intends to discover the supra-historical spiritual characteristics of the human individual, and to indicate how they tend towards the choice of faith.<sup>30</sup>

Sacred and secular meet, then, in time, but in a way which avoids any identification with history by restricting this meeting to an instant and then once again breaking apart. For Kierkegaard the concept of the instant sums up the essence of both the incarnation and the act of faith.<sup>31</sup>

'The concept around which everything turns in Christianity, the concept which makes all things new, is the fullness of time, the instant as eternity, and yet this eternity is at once the future and the past. If one does not give heed to this, one cannot save any concept from heretical and treasonable admixtures which destroy the concept. One does not get the past as a thing for itself but in simple continuity with the future — and with that the concepts of conversion, atonement, redemption are resolved in the significance of world-history, and resolved in the individual historical development. One does not get the future as a thing for itself but in

simple continuity with the present – and with that the concepts of resurrection and judgement come to naught.<sup>32</sup>

The instant 'is the ambiguous moment where time and eternity touch one another'.<sup>33</sup> This union of time and eternity is a constant present, 'not properly an atom of time but an atom of eternity'.<sup>34</sup> Man shares the characteristics of the instant – he is a 'synthesis of the temporal and the eternal'.<sup>35</sup>

Kierkegaard's emphasis on the instant represented an attack on the Hegelian doctrine of immanence. For Kierkegaard, the doctrine of immanence meant the 'translatability' of the historical events of revelation and redemption into speculative categories, since 'as long as the Eternal and the historical are external to one another, the historical is merely an occasion'.<sup>36</sup> If history was fully intelligible to speculative, universal categories, then its particularity and thereby its historicity were abolished. If providence and reason were a unity the Biblical story of God's saving activity could eventually be transcended by a speculative re-telling of the spirit's self-elaboration in creation. Christianity, unlike speculative philosophy, which resolves the past into 'the pure being of the eternal', depends on the interaction of God and the existing individual in time:

'The paradoxical religiousness breaks with immanence and makes the fact of existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence but against immanence. There is no longer any immanent fundamental kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered time and would constitute there the kinship.'<sup>37</sup>

The union of world-historical events and divine life, as two sides of the same coin, is destroyed by the decision of the personal divine to intervene in history at a particular moment, to reject epochal self-revelation in favour of the instant of incarnation, and to demand that man approach Him in that paradoxical form rather than through the medium of speculative reason. This paradox is not effective only at a certain level of the understanding but rock-hard and impervious to all forms of speculative reinterpretation:

'the Deity . . . does not want to be at one moment for the believer the paradox, and then little by little to supply him with an understanding; for the martyrdom of faith (crucifixion of the understanding) is not a martyrdom of the instant but precisely the martyrdom of endurance.'<sup>38</sup>

Because of this the virtue of culture can only be that it makes it more difficult to become a Christian.<sup>39</sup>

For Kierkegaard, the philosophy of immanence, from Socrates to Hegel, rejected the instant of time as irrelevant to the knowledge of God: 'each individual is his own centre and the entire world centres in him, because his self-knowledge is knowledge of God'.<sup>40</sup> The Christian alternative to this is that the instant possesses unique importance, because the eternal came into temporal existence in it –

'could the contradiction have been greater than that the news of the day should be the swaddling clothes of the eternal . . . so that the *Moment* is really decisive for eternity.'<sup>41</sup>

While the Greeks and all other speculative thinkers concentrated upon the process of recollection to re-create the structures of being, a process possible for every man, the Christian concentrates upon the moment.<sup>42</sup> The paradox of the Christian truth is intensified by the fact that the Divine does not choose a commensurate form for its instantaneous incarnation, but rather takes the human nature of a despised and suffering man –

'when the occasion and the occasioned correspond, and are as commensurable as the answer of the desert with the cry that evokes it, the Moment does not appear, but is lost in the eternity of Recollection. The Moment makes its appearance when an eternal resolve comes into relation with an incommensurable occasion.'<sup>43</sup>

Kierkegaard intensified his attack on the philosophy of immanence by striking at its root – the possibility of a proof of the existence of God. The weakness of all attempts at finding such a proof is the necessity of assuming God's existence as a presupposition. The induction of a wise creator from nature depends on the assumption of an ideality abstracted from the world and imposed back on it – brute reality constantly offers us occasion to doubt the existence of divine wisdom. Such a proof is derived 'from the works as apprehended through an ideal interpretation, i.e. such as they do not immediately reveal themselves'.<sup>44</sup> The amassing of proofs by a chain of reasoning can never cross the abyss separating possibility and existence – this can be achieved only by a spiritual leap that is not analogous to the rational process. A chain of reasoning posing as a proof for the existence of God is only an

'additional development of the consequences that flow from my having assumed that the object in question exists. Thus I always reason from existence, not towards existence, whether I move in the sphere of palpable sensible fact or in the realm of thought. Whether we call existence an *accessorium* or the eternal *prius*, it is never subject to demonstration.'<sup>45</sup>

In any case, such attempts at proof can leave us only with the empty concept of the Unknown, a concept which may immediately be filled with all the connotations of the word God, but not by the work of reason, which can reach no further than this Unknown. If reason were to be rid of its immanentist illusions, and to be integrated into the Christian stage of existence, it must recognize that its true goal is to seek its own downfall, to 'seek a thought it cannot think'.<sup>46</sup> In this way it unites itself with the paradox of faith, the paradox of the union of the eternal and the temporal in the instant. Thus reason and the paradox 'are linked in understanding, but this understanding is present only in the moment of passion'.<sup>47</sup>

For Kierkegaard, once the possibility of reaching eternal truths by speculative introspection is denied, then the idea of contemporaneity becomes essential, since otherwise an individual's relationship to the divine must be tied completely to the reliability of a process of historical transmission. Such a process of historical transmission is not only unreliable, a system of approximations which can never stimulate faith, but also destroys the uniqueness of the relationship between God and the individual believer. If each generation were to depend on the preceding one for its faith, that must imply a dependence, in the most essential sphere, by one man upon another. The truth of revelation becomes something entrusted to the vagaries of human culture, and what should be the equal distance of all ages from God becomes the worship of a human tradition. Being a disciple depends on a gift from God, and is therefore always at first hand. If each generation were to depend on the previous one, then it must defer to it as a teacher. For Kierkegaard, this represents a return to the Greek concept of knowledge as recollection, in which the teacher played the role of uncovering an eternal truth, theoretically discoverable by every man, and was revered by his pupil for his wisdom. The Christian, in contrast, must relate directly to the unique factual truth of Christ, which no generation of men is capable of revealing to another, and which can never be hit upon by introspection.<sup>48</sup>

For Kierkegaard, all that each generation can do for its successor is to tell it of how it believed 'although it is a folly to the understanding and an offense to the human heart'.<sup>49</sup> The teacher of Christian truth creates the conditions for contemporaneity only when he has done everything in his power 'to prevent anyone else from determining his own attitude in immediate continuity with mine'.<sup>50</sup> The radical unreason of the incarnation must never be covered over by acquiring the respectability of history and the authority of the prevailing wisdom. The task of each age is simply to make it possible to approach it once more with total freshness, and to warn of the dire difficulties associated with Christian belief. It is



'the historical fact which can become an object only for faith, and which one human being cannot communicate to another, i.e. which can be communicated to another but not so the other believes it; and which if communicated in the form of faith is so communicated as to prevent the other, so far as possible, from accepting it immediately.'<sup>51</sup>

Kierkegaard's judgement of the eighteen centuries of Christian tradition is, therefore, supremely negative. Insofar as they claim to add anything to the basic fact of the incarnation, or even to develop its meaning in terms appropriate to varying human cultures, their effects are pernicious. The abolition of 1,800 years of Christian tradition is the prerequisite for the restoration of contemporaneity.<sup>52</sup> Since Christian truth is in no sense a body of knowledge, but a way of life that must be pursued by each individual, then there can be no historical amplification or deepening of it. Each generation must begin the task of faith completely anew.<sup>52</sup> The idea of truth as a result, as the accumulation of historical efforts, again returns to the doctrine of immanence. If truth is the 'duplication of being in terms of thought', then the Christian cannot relate to one unique event as his teacher but must rather engage in respectful dialogue with the greatest practitioners of the art of reflection. But if the truth is one person alone whose nature is impervious to reason, which nullifies the attempts of reason to comprehend it, then truth for the Christian can be nothing but a way of life, a form of being, an *imitatio Christi*.<sup>53</sup>

For Kierkegaard, 'Christ's life on earth (and this is what Christianity is) is sacred history, which must not be confounded with the history of the human race or of the world'.<sup>54</sup> Because the incarnation occurs in an instant without any effect on the rest of world-history and because the response of the believer to Christ must be made in abstraction from the cultural conditions of his age, then the relationship of the incarnation to the world as world, the world as secularity, can only be one of opposition. Kierkegaard rejects the possibility of a permeation of the world by the incarnation, and his understanding of the Kingdom of God is emphatically restricted to the expectation of eternal happiness of the individual believer: 'faith protests every form of objectivity, it desires that the subject should be infinitely concerned about himself'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, this expectation is for him the context in which the decision for faith is made and its power is what generates the passion capable of embracing the absurd. This faith is 'an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual'.<sup>56</sup> Human guilt, too, becomes visible in its enormity only when considered in the light of the hope for eternal happiness: 'The totality of guilt-consciousness in the

particular individual before God in relation to an eternal happiness is religiousness'.<sup>57</sup>

Between the moment of the incarnation and the isolated, subjective response of the believer, the historical and collective world lies desolate of grace. All doctrines giving importance to the 1,800 years of Christian history, all attempts by human reason to give a form to the Christian truth that will have value, interest or, worst of all, binding power, for subsequent generations, are guilty of ascribing to the incarnation the role of salvation of the world. To give it such a role is once again to succumb to the doctrine of immanence, to abstract the divine from its unique presence in the moment of Jesus and permeate history with it, to assume an 'objective' presence of God in the workings of history which must threaten the value of the individual's subjective attempt to appropriate the truth of redemption as something that is won in defiance of all objectivity, all reason and the voice of all those around him. The denial of the presence of the spirit of God in the world is the final argument against the claims of history and against the illusions of those who suppose that the human race is capable of Christianizing itself through history:

'it is falsehood, all that talk by which men flatter the race and themselves, about the world advancing. For the world goes neither backward nor forward, it remains essentially the same, like the sea and the air, in short, like an element; for it is and shall continue to be the element which can furnish the proof of the reality of being a Christian, which always means being a member of a militant Church.'<sup>59</sup>

Kierkegaard's emphatic disassociation of faith from objective reason is reinforced by his doctrine of the offense, the repulsion which the absurdity of the incarnation provokes. This repulsion is made possible only if the fact of Christ is approached in contemporaneity, without weakening its impact by reflection upon His glory and the consequences which His life is assumed to have had on history. As humble and despised, Christ repels the majority of those who claim to be Christian, and in this lowly form makes nonsense of all attempts at speculative re-interpretation of the incarnation as the unity of God and the human species, the paragon of humanity:

'In Christendom we have all become Christian without taking notice of . . . that which incidentally is the Christian weapon of defence against 'speculative comprehension' and a death-dealing weapon against it, viz. the possibility of the offence.'<sup>59</sup>

Christianity must stand or fall on 'the need to recognize the *offence* of the existence of the God-man and the need to overcome it'.<sup>60</sup> By

abolishing contemporaneity Christendom celebrates Christ's victory and never genuinely faces his suffering and lowliness as a real event. Without the risk of the offence, the believer can never enter the sphere of commitment in which faith becomes possible: if truth is subjectivity then it depends on the quality of subjective life, and the grasp of an ultimate truth depends on the abandonment of all means of certainty other than total commitment.

The immediacy of faith, a category developed by Kierkegaard in conscious opposition to Hegel's critique of all immediacy, stems from its character as a leap, and the offence is what makes such a leap necessary: 'the possibility of offence is just the repellent force by which faith comes into existence – if one does not choose instead to be offended'.<sup>61</sup> The pretense of speculative philosophy to incorporate Christianity within itself, or even to transcend it, depends on its assumption that the meaning of the incarnation is the union of God and the human race. This is a theory which finally returns to the realm of immanence – since the single historical event of the incarnation need be only the highest point of this union – and which is incapable of arousing any offence at all.

'The God-Man is the unity of God and mankind. Such terminology exhibits the profundity of optical illusion. The Godman is the unity of God and an individual man. That the human race is or should be akin to God is ancient paganism; but that an individual man is God is Christianity.'<sup>62</sup>

Just as sin was the destruction of the perfect self-sufficiency of ethics, so is it also the abolition of the possibility of a speculative knowledge of God. The only possible alternative to the Socratic model of the search for truth, in which the seeker already possesses the truth but must be instructed by the teacher in the art of recollection, is the awareness that man, as a sinful creature, cannot even be thought of as a seeker after truth. For the Christian, God as teacher gives man truth as revelation at the same time as he gives him the condition necessary for desiring, seeking it and receiving it. The gift of truth does not develop the innate, slumbering powers of every man, as the Socratic dialectic and all forms of philosophy since hold, but is a conversion, making a new man.<sup>63</sup> The essential equality that prevailed between Socrates and his pupils contrasts violently with the relationship between sinful man and God.

The abandonment of the external world, the turning towards God, is achieved first of all by the discovery of guilt: for the Christian, in contrast to the pupil of Socrates, introspection does not evoke knowledge of the structure of being and of the immortality of the soul, but the awareness of personal nothingness and the intense desire for that im-

mortality. The discovery of the radical possibilities of freedom is at the same time the dread induced by the fact that freedom can never avoid guilt: human freedom and human guilt are linked, and their union arouses dread of freedom. From this dread the individual turns to God, having exhausted the possibilities of freedom. The knowledge of God is not gained by humanity acting at the height of its powers, but by the individual aware of his own radical limitations, and the more acute the awareness of these limitations, the greater the sense of God: 'With respect to the possibility of freedom it holds good that the more profoundly guilt is discovered, the greater is the genius, for man's greatness depends solely upon the energy of the God-relationship in him.'<sup>64</sup> Dread consumes all the hopes of worldly freedom and lays the human soul open to God: 'Dread is the possibility of freedom. Only this dread is by the aid of faith absolutely educative, consuming as it does all finite aims and discovering all their deceptions.'<sup>65</sup>

For Kierkegaard, the radically undetermined character of human freedom was an essential weapon against the doctrine of immanence and its corollary, historical necessity. If history was the product of a necessary process then the 'instant' had no place in it, since all events must be part of a whole, and none could claim unique status. The idea of contemporaneity could not be harmonized with a necessary historical process, since necessity implies determinism and determinism lodges the individual firmly in a definite historical environment. Necessity could be united with a certain idea of providence, but must accept the events of world history as the self-revelation of God. For Kierkegaard, to understand the past as a product of a necessary process is to understand it solely as pastness and to miss its character as lived and acted history:

'The past has come into existence; coming into existence is the change of actuality brought about by freedom, i.e. it would no longer belong to that by which it came into existence . . . if necessity could gain a foothold at a single point, there would no longer be any distinguishing between the past and the future.'<sup>66</sup>

Kierkegaard had a similar understanding of the implications of the idea of historical necessity to Cieszkowski. For Cieszkowski, the predictability of the future must follow from the idea of historical necessity that Hegel had developed. Hegel's reticence to predict the future must be overcome by the new science of 'historiosophy', capable of creating the spiritual conditions for the building of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>67</sup> For Hess, some kind of fore-knowledge of the future was essential to stimulate man to enact the 'free spiritual deed' essential for the achievement of communism. Kierkegaard's rejection of the idea of necessity was a part of his rejection of the importance of history as a guide to solutions to the problem of existence: neither the study of the

past nor a projected future reconciliation of the tensions of human existence could serve as substitutes for a radical re-assessment of the trans-historical possibilities of human freedom.

Kierkegaard's doctrine of a transcendent God, who shuns all participation in history apart from the sudden invasion of the instant of the incarnation, supported his rejection of historical necessity. History is a realm of contingency: only God is a necessary being, and he cannot be identified with the historical process. To find God in history is possible, but only by discovering the incarnation, a discovery for which, in the nature of the case, there can be no evidence. The facts of history can never be justifiably linked with any hope of salvation, nor with the eventual achievement of a reconciled world of brotherly love. All historical knowledge is approximate, part of a wholly different sphere of experience to the hope for an eternal blessedness, or indeed to the hope for a final harmony within the historical world. But Kierkegaard's argument goes further than denying the validity of any future project derived from the idea of historical necessity. For him, because the absolute's participation in history is severely limited to the instant of the incarnation, there can be no justifiable attempt to discern those aspects of secular history which most closely conform to the ethical ideals of Christianity. The notion of God's grace in history, the presence of the spirit who inscrutably leads mankind towards its goal, cannot be reconciled with Kierkegaard's doctrine of the instant. Since God revealed Himself in the incarnation alone, His presence in the world is restricted to specifically sacred institutions, those engaged in the activity of worship without direct concern for the historical human condition.

For Kierkegaard, it is not possible to speak of a relative presence of God's providence in the great events of freedom and enlightenment of secular history. Salvation history, the Christ event, is a moment without any relevance to or connection with secular history. Hegel's philosophy, by contrast, attempted to demonstrate that the incarnation and the secular quest for freedom and enlightenment were part of a whole, that the spiritual victory of Jesus had permeated the secular world and made possible human life based on institutions informed by reason and freedom. Since Kierkegaard rejects such a connection, the characteristics of secular institutions remain profoundly indifferent to him. Since sacred and secular history never overlap, Church and world always remain fundamentally opposed. There is no presence of God in the world apart from the possibility of an encounter with the incarnation in contemporaneity, an encounter that is only possible through the self-extrication of each individual from history. History is the world of the conditioned and the continuous — even the most radical revolution must preserve elements of the past. For Kierkegaard, in contrast, the

leap of faith is possible only by an assertion of complete discontinuity. It

'cannot be taught or communicated directly, precisely because it is an act of isolation, which leaves it to the individual to decide, respecting that which cannot be thought, whether he will resolve believingly to accept it by virtue of the absurdity.'<sup>68</sup>

Such a leap cannot be lightly made, indeed can only be made under the pressure of the most profound despair, the collapse of the ethical and the dashing of all secular hopes. Only when the historical world has become dust and ashes can the individual achieve the state of mind necessary for undertaking the leap of faith.

## 2. CHRISTIANITY AND SECULAR CIVILIZATION

Kierkegaard's understanding of ethics and of religion was an attempt to free the individual from the hold of history and the group. The contemporaneity of faith prevented as much as possible the identification of the heritage of Jesus with the fate of any worldly institution and no part of history besides the instant of the incarnation could claim any special mandate from God. For Kierkegaard, the need to create a society fulfilling the ideal demands of Christ, or to make possible the fullest possible symbiosis between the Church of Christ and secular society, did not and could not exist, since the perception of such a need was based on categories irrelevant to faith. Yet the attempt to develop such a synthesis of Church and world had dominated Christian history, and was a major element in the philosophy of Hegel. For Kierkegaard, the task in hand was to put into stark relief the true content of faith in radical dissociation from secular civilization. His rejection of historical immanentism did not only abolish all possibility of seeing the major events of modern history as complex evidences of progress, but also prevented an identification of the Christian life with the maintenance of the hallowed institutions of the past. Kierkegaard's attack on the absorption of faith by civilization rejected the appearance of a past harmony as well as the projects of the future that would base both Church and society on common principles of freedom and reason. The attack on the conservative Christian establishment and on religious and social liberalism constantly intersected in the critical concept of the 'crowd', the collective that sought to destroy both the individual and genuine faith by repressing any spiritual life that gave no comfort to its lust for mediocre security.

For Kierkegaard, the Christian life could not achieve any stable rela-

tionship with the world except that of suffering and persecution. Since the world remained essentially the same throughout history, and since the characteristic of the world was implacable hostility to the truth of the incarnation and all those who sought to model their lives by it, then both the conservative ideal of a secular world permeated by a triumphant and unified Church and the liberal project of a new humanism that could inform both Church and society must be valueless.

Although both ideologies were equally anathema to him, Kierkegaard's conclusions about society itself remained deeply conservative, while his attitude to the Church was based on even more radical premises than those of the liberals, proposing not merely the complete (though not 'external') separation of Church and state, but also the need for the Church to live in a relationship of suffering and persecution to the secular order. Secular and sacred were never to make up a seamless garment, since the work of God in history had never accepted the secular on any terms.

#### a. *Christendom and Christian Witness*

For Kierkegaard, the claim of speculative reason to comprehend the life of the individual in the knowledge of history was related to the basic urge of institutions to set themselves up as sacred instruments, patterning faith according to their own priorities. The offense of the incarnation to reason, breaking apart the supposed congruence of historical and eternal by the instant, was also its offense to institutions, since 'Christ was a mere human individual who comes into collision with the established order'.<sup>69</sup> A fantastic union of God and the species might endorse the pretensions of collective institutions but the presence of the divine in a single individual, who could be related to only in an isolated and isolating act of faith, could not. Since the meaning of Christianity lay in the God-relationship of individuals, institutions could claim divine origin only by a sleight of hand. The divinity of the established order was a falsehood made possible only by ignoring its origin:

'It began with the God-relationship of the individual; but now this must be forgotten, the bridge hewn down, the established order deified . . . it is precisely the deification of the established order which constitutes the constant rebellion, the permanent revolt against God.'<sup>70</sup>

Like every individual, the established order must learn to live in fear and trembling, never forgetting its complete dependence on God, its thoroughly conditional character. Instead, its purpose and tendency has always been to aggrandize itself, to abolish God and to cow the individ-

ual. Since the source of faith, God's involvement with men, is only in the communion with the incarnation made by each individual in isolation, then the total domination of established institutions is the total impoverishment of faith, the final perversion of Christianity into an instrument of the secular urge for power:

'The deification of the established order is the secularization of everything. The established order may be quite right in affirming that, so far as worldly things are concerned, one must attach oneself to the established order, be content with the relativity, etc. But in the end one secularizes also the God-relationship, insists that this shall be congruous with a certain relativity, not essentially different from one's station in life, etc. — instead of which it must be for every individual man the absolute, and it is precisely this God-relationship of the individual which must put every established order in suspense, so that God, at any instant He will, by pressure upon the individual has immediately in his God-relationship a witness, a reporter, a spy . . . one who in unconditional obedience . . . by persecution, suffering and death, puts the established order in suspense.'<sup>71</sup>

In this sense, an individual appealing to his own God-relationship above the claims of established order, does not make himself more than man but simply points out the legitimate religious rights of the individual.

The established order refuses to recognize that it is nothing but an aggregate of individuals, each with his or her own God-relationship.

'The established order desires to be totalitarian, recognizing nothing over it, but having under it every individual, and judging every individual who is integrated in it. And 'that individual', who expounds the most humble, but at the same time the most humane doctrine about what it means to be a man, the established order desires to terrify him by imputing to him the guilt of blasphemy.'<sup>72</sup>

By abolishing contemporaneity, ignoring the suffering and travail of Christ's life on earth, the Church has gradually come to identify the victory of Christ with its own institutional success and finally with its own victory over all contending forces for cultural dominance. The salvation of the individual believer is replaced by the continuing power of established religion as the true meaning of redemption:

'Christendom has abolished Christianity — on the other hand, it would like to inherit Him and His great name. To gain advantage from the immense consequences of His life, coming pretty close to appropriating these consequences as its own meritorious achievement and making us believe that Christendom is Christ.'<sup>73</sup>

Rather than confronting Christ's own life as a contemporary challenge, approaching Christian existence as a task for the spiritual resources of each new generation, Christendom calls us merely to join in a triumphant parade. It presents itself as a historical entity and asserts that union



with itself must unite the individual with the suffering Christ, yet the combined power of all the secular and arbitrary elements that make it up prevents any sort of insight into the demands of primitive Christianity.

The existential context of the hope for eternal blessedness, and the leap of faith that is based upon it, is the awareness of sin as a dreadful offence: the final stage in Kierkegaard's dialectic of existence is the acceptance of the awful distance between the natural and the divine orders, a distance demanding the abandonment of an objective search for knowledge and the staking of all on faith, conceived in passionate inwardness, 'the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity'.<sup>74</sup> This dissociation of the Christian and the worldly is abolished by Christendom. The attempt by the Church to dominate all of society ends in its own reduction to the status of a harmless appendage to secular civilization:

'The relation of the Christian to the worldly is conceived, at the most, as a potentialization (or more exactly under the rubric, culture), always directly; it is simply a direct comparative, the positive being civic rectitude.'<sup>75</sup>

Christianity suffers its ultimate trivialization in the well-rounded world of bourgeois society, becoming no more than a seasoning added to the complacent blend of respectability and maximization of worldly goods. The effort needed to overcome the offence of the incarnation to reason, made in the hope of gaining eternal blessedness, is rendered superfluous simply by being born in Christendom.

For Kierkegaard, the essential absurdity of the union of the divine with a particular person meant that the incarnation could never be communicated by one person to another in any direct way. Since the essential fact of Christianity conflicts with all the processes of natural reason, since it was accessible only to those who had already experienced the states of mind analysed by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Dread* and *The Sickness unto Death*, it could never be reduced to the status of a datum of information or a corollary of group membership. The overriding tendency of Christendom was to set itself up not only as the guardian of faith, but also to regard itself as its actual communicator. The historical institution of the Church, sacrificing its immediate identification with the living Jesus for the goal of harmony with secular civilization, imparts Christian dogma in a manner suited to the intellectual habits of the age. Since both the Church itself and the manner of its teaching are citizens of the age, direct communication is eminently suitable for its purpose of drawing the largest possible number of members into its body. But such direct communication is in contrast to the

manner of Christ's own existence and to the peculiar subjectivity essential for receptivity to Christ.

'One must perceive that direct communication is an impossibility for the Godman, for being the sign of contradiction He cannot communicate Himself directly; even to be a sign involves a qualification of reflection, and how much more to be a sign of contradiction. And at the same time one must perceive that the modern confusion had succeeded in transforming the whole of Christianity into direct communication by leaving out the Communicator, the God-man . . . It is 1,800 years since Christ lived, so He is forgotten — only His teaching remains — that is to say, Christianity has been done away with.'<sup>76</sup>

This direct communication has removed the possibility of the offense, purporting to make the assimilation of the fact of the incarnation as easy as that of any set of historical data. Because of this faith itself is absent from Christendom, since such direct communication requires no special category of faith, a hypertension of subjective inwardness, but can rely on the types of rational and emotional receptivity accepted in all forms of secular knowledge. The art of receptivity to indirect communication which is faith can survive only when Christian institutions constantly make the attempt to face the paradox of Christ in the mode of contemporaneity, placing the fact of Christ before its members with the reminder that the communication of belief itself is beyond the Church's own power.

Just as the incarnation was discontinuous with history and with reason, so the Christian's life must be discontinuous with the world. Adapted as he is to a truth that at all times militated against worldly concerns, conforming to the pattern of the living Jesus, the Christian, far from achieving harmony with secular civilization, lives a life of suffering. This suffering is not the result of the harshness of Christianity itself, but the consequence of the world's hatred for all those who choose to defy it and to set their hearts and minds on a transcendent goal:

'This is the test: to become and to remain a Christian, through suffering with which no other human sufferings can compare in painfulness and anguish. Yet it is not Christianity that is cruel, nor is it Christ. No, Christ in Himself is gentleness and love, He is gentleness and love itself; the cruelty consists in the fact that the Christian has to live in this world and express in the environment of this world what it is to be a Christian — for Christ is not so gentle, i.e. so weak, that He would take the Christian out of the world.'<sup>77</sup>

Christ's transcendence of the world in glory, his exaltation above the world, is the pattern of the Christian's behaviour — Christ's exaltation above the world must become the humiliation of the Christian, his

degradation at the hands of the world. The Christian reflects Christ's exaltation above the world by remaining in suffering beneath the contempt of the world: his radical separation from the world must remain a form of intense humiliation until he is united with Christ by death.<sup>78</sup>

In the same way as the individual, the Church itself can only follow Christ by suffering. The notion of a Christendom that comprehends the world, that is the developed unity of Christianity and secular civilization, that even claims to have produced a Christian civilization, leaves nothing more to contend about and nothing to defend. Such a claim must be tantamount to the blasphemous assertion that the Kingdom of God has already been realized. For Kierkegaard it is the constant tendency of Christendom to suppose that a relative and superficial harmony of Church and world represents a final and definitive form of Christian civilization. For Kierkegaard, such an illusion results only from the cowardly reluctance of the Church to assert the true content of Christianity:

'What then is to be understood by a triumphant Church? By this we are to understand that the time for contending is past, that the Church, although it is still in this world, has nothing to contend for or to contend about. But then the Church and this world have become synonymous; and such in fact is precisely the case, not only with all that has called itself the triumphant church, but with all that is called an established Christendom. For in this world Christ's Church can truly survive only by contending, that is, by fighting for its survival every instant.'<sup>79</sup>

The militant Church, in contrast, expresses nothing more than the fact that the world is always opposed to Christianity – a member of the militant Church is marked out by suffering, a member of Christendom by his reception of honour and esteem.

In his aggressive presentation of the Christian imperatives of militancy and suffering, Kierkegaard substantially transformed the emphases of his earlier philosophical and aesthetic works. In *Fear and Trembling* he had constantly dwelt upon the essence of faith as inwardness, as a secret relationship with a divine command that could never be visible even to the closest companion. The Hegelian insistence on the commensurability of the inner and the outer (and the Young Hegelian demand, first enunciated in Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, that it be realized in political and social *praxis*) is rejected by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* in the most essential sphere of existence, the individual's relationship to the absolute. The 'knight of faith' is for ever invisible to the eyes of the world. His disguise as an ordinary person, ethically unremarkable and culturally insignificant, is perfect:

'no smartly dressed townsman who walks out to Fresberg on a Sunday afternoon treads the ground more firmly, he belongs entirely to the world, no Philistine more so. One can discover nothing of that aloof and superior nature whereby one recognizes the knight of the infinite. He takes delight in everything and whenever one sees him taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things.'<sup>80</sup>

Faith had no unique consequences in ethical action, and could never be discerned in the external behaviour of an individual. As inwardness, as subjective passion, faith dealt with a style of existence that was simply invisible to those who were still in the midst of the less problematic stages on life's way. It could not be measured by any of the natural world's parameters, unlike ethics or deism (Kierkegaard's 'religion A'). For Kierkegaard, the inwardness of faith implied the most complete differentiation from the world, which yet could return to the world and enjoy natural pleasures to the full. Involvement in the world, for the 'knight of faith', was effortlessly combined with supreme detachment.

The value of this ideal diminished for Kierkegaard with the realization that 'hidden inwardness' could describe not only the man who had passed through all the stages of natural existence, but also serve as a cover for those members of Christendom who made no effort even to reach the ethical stage. Established Christianity continued to employ the disastrous fiction of a spiritual body coterminous with the whole nation because it could resort to the notion of 'hidden inwardness'. All are assumed to be Christian in Christendom, and this 'all' is indistinguishable from 'none'. The cloak of 'hidden inwardness' serves only to conceal the complete lack of distinction between truly Christian and secular behaviour. The Church of 'hidden inwardness', where the Christianity of every subject of the king is taken for granted, has not only reduced Christianity to a harmless and sentimental piety but abstracted it out of existence:

'If so called established Christendom maybe does not expressly call itself the Church triumphant, perhaps disdaining this name as an externality, it nevertheless produces the same confusion by means of 'hidden inwardness'; for, again, established Christendom, where all are Christian, but only in hidden inwardness, resembles the militant Church just as little as the stillness of death resembles vociferous passion.'<sup>81</sup>

To uncover the subterfuge of 'hidden inwardness' it was not necessary to begin to search men's hearts and minds in an inquisitorial way, but simply to begin 'to confess Christ in the midst of Christendom'.<sup>82</sup>

The ideal of Christendom, which works such as Novalis's *Die Christenheit oder Europa* had made the mainstay of Christian romantic political thought, represented the conquest of the world by the Church

and the formation of a society that accepted Christian institutions as its 'soul'. The Church needed no independence from society since it had succeeded in making that society its own, restraining the evil of the world by its own cultural and political hegemony. For Hegel, the basic flaw in this philosophy lay in its failure to see that a world not yet brought to the point where institutions based on freedom and reason could develop in a purely inner-worldly way must eventually permeate the Church that sought to dominate it, and assert the evil of the world in the very heart of the Church:

'the ruling power takes this worldliness to itself; all inclinations, all passions, all spiritless worldliness enters the Church through this rule itself, since the worldly is not yet reconciled in itself.'<sup>83</sup>

Kierkegaard's rejection of Christendom is made with greater violence than Hegel's as well as from a very different positive standpoint.<sup>84</sup> For Kierkegaard the solution is not, as it was for Hegel, to liberate secular institutions from ecclesiastical hegemony so that they may eventually evolve into the institutions of freedom, and subsequently persuade the laggard Church to accept this freedom as the fundament of both state and Church. Rather, the Church must simply fulfil its own true task of witnessing to the eternal and unchanging evil of the world and to the contemporary Christ whose example imposes the duty of suffering and humiliation upon the small band of his followers. For Hegel, the Church is doomed in its attempts to dominate an unfree world, while for Kierkegaard a Church attempting to relate to the secular world in any accommodating sense at all is a betrayal of Christ.

'Woe, woe to the Christian Church if it would triumph in this world, for then it is not the Church that triumphs, but the world has triumphed. Then the heterogeneity of Christianity and the world is done away with, the world has won, Christianity lost. Then Christ is no more the God-man, but only a distinguished man whose life is homogeneous with the development of the race. Then eternity is done away with, and the stage for the perfection of all is transferred to the temporal.'<sup>85</sup>

Christianity is an absolute which is effectively abolished once it loses its radical distinctiveness from the world.

The critique of 'hidden inwardness' is related, for Kierkegaard, to the critique of those who are capable of admiring the exalted Christ but incapable of grasping the extent of his suffering and humility while alive. Even the understanding of Christ as the atonement for sin, while never disappearing from Kierkegaard's thought, begins to be held in tension with the ideal of 'Christ the pattern', Christ the inviter of radical discipleship. The sufferings of a genuine *imitatio Christi* are opposed to all

those doctrines that are incapable of making radical inroads into the self-satisfaction of a civilized bourgeois world.<sup>86</sup> Suffering as a mark of the true Church became one of Kierkegaard's most powerfully expressed themes. The cooperation of Christian institutions and political society was tolerable so long as the leaders of the Church recognized the drastic difference between their own lives and that of Jesus and his disciples. Kierkegaard accepted that the means of grace continued to be present in a Church that was aware of its own worldliness, and he granted that 'hidden inwardness' was a sufficient basis for the christian life for those who made no claim to heroic discipleship.

For a long time Kierkegaard resisted all liberal attacks on the established Church, forgiving it all its failures so long as it made no claim to be the continuing replica of primitive Christianity.<sup>87</sup> Finally, however, the panegyric of Bishop Martensen on his predecessor Bishop Mynster provoked an eventual reply from Kierkegaard that ended all compromise. Martensen had called Mynster a 'genuine witness to the truth', having a faith shown 'not merely by word and profession, but in deed and truth', one of the 'holy chain of witnesses to the truth which stretches through the ages from the days of the Apostles.'<sup>88</sup> The withdrawal of the crucial concession that the Church knew itself to be only a shadowy imitation of the primitive Church, the praising of the Primate of the established Church as a 'genuine witness to the truth', a term to which Kierkegaard attached enormous weight, burst asunder all the limits he had imposed on his own critique of the established Church and began a series of newspaper articles and pamphlets that ended only with Kierkegaard's death. Lacking the philosophical and literary subtlety of his pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom was intended to create an effect by the brutal force of its condemnation. As the final effort of his life, this group of writings must be considered to be a significant expression of his understanding of Christianity and the theme of the separation of Christian faith from the world was here given its most radical treatment.

For Kierkegaard, a witness to the truth must invite martyrdom, a thing inconceivable in a cleric of the established Church. The lives of all such clerics exhibited a startling contrast to that of Jesus, who lived 'in poverty, in abasement, with renunciation of everything, in the most unconditional heterogeneity to this world, at the furthest remove from all use or application of worldly power'.<sup>89</sup> Despite the full complement of Christian institutions and all their accoutrements that exist in the land, the vanity of a Church that is incapable of realizing the depth of the abyss that separates it from the world of Jesus and his disciples must render all its potential grasp over the hearts and minds of the nation useless. Indeed, it is the attempt to be a national Church itself that abolishes

the possibility of remaining in the holy tradition of Christian discipleship. By accepting the patronage of the state the Church gained a mass of members, became as large as the nation, as Christendom itself, but at the same moment lost all genuinely Christian characteristics:

‘Christianity has been abolished by expansion, by these millions of name-Christians, the number of which is surely meant to conceal the fact that there is not one Christian, that Christianity simply does not exist.’<sup>40</sup>

The state and Christianity should relate to quantity in contradictory ways: while the state thrives on the mass of its members, Christianity prospers from reduction to a holy remnant. Its founding principle is opposition to the world, and this opposition is highlighted only when the artifice of Christendom has been destroyed.

For Kierkegaard, the true Christian Church must be a realm of vitality, since it is the domain of the individual, capable of exerting influence on the Church from the power of his own God-relationship. The state, in contrast, was an institution incorporating all the fossilized forms of life that had not yet been subjected to the critical powers of individuality. In defining the individual as the true source of its life, the Church marked itself off clearly from the state, which was incapable of any creativity. The discovery of the spiritual value of inner-worldly activity, which Protestantism – following the example of Luther’s marriage – had considered to be one of its greatest achievements, had ended, for Kierkegaard, in the emasculation of Christian spirituality.<sup>91</sup> His evaluation of Protestantism as a force in cultural history is directly opposed to Hegel’s. While for Hegel the victory of Protestantism is the union of spirituality with the useful toil of daily life and the rational pursuit of an integrated society, for Kierkegaard,

‘Protestantism, Christianity considered, is quite simply an untruth, a piece of dishonesty, which falsifies the teaching, the world-view, the life-view of Christianity, just as soon as it is regarded as a principle for Christianity, not as a remedy (corrective) at a given time and place.’<sup>92</sup>

The reconciliation with secular life-styles and with the national state that had occurred in the beginning of the Protestant era had resulted, for Kierkegaard, in the complete failure of the Protestant Churches to retain an independent criterion of Christian life, accepting the gradual secularization of the Gospel and its final reduction to a spiritual appendage to worldly civilization. By accepting the validity of secular culture, the Church had accepted the definitions of Christianity formulated by this culture, definitions which had finally given the leading role in man’s regeneration to a false humanism, which neglected both

Christ and the real individual in favour of the 'fantastic unity of God and the species'.

In the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard had contrasted the illusion of modern Protestantism, that it had successfully resolved the conflict between living *coram Deo* and involvement in worldly activity, with the solutions of the middle ages. While intending himself neither to enter a cloister nor to become a Catholic, Kierkegaard found the medieval solution to be determined by a greater seriousness and a more profound grasp of the problem than the consensus of modern Protestantism: 'The Middle Ages made an energetic attempt existentially to think God and the finite together, but came to the conclusion it could not be done, and the expression for this is the cloister.'<sup>93</sup> The problem itself is the duty of inner-worldly Christian existence, in which the 'God-relationship and the finite world in all its smallest detail (where the difficulty becomes greatest) are to be held together existentially'.<sup>94</sup> The Middle Ages had been wrong to separate the God-relationship from the rest of life – by setting up the institution of the cloister it simply created a new form of externality – but the authentic solution to the problem is far more difficult than the comfortable worldliness of Christendom.

For Kierkegaard, in the *Postscript*, the solution was not to change any outward forms, but to develop a new internal awareness of the nothingness of worldly endeavour that must accompany the slightest action as well as the greatest exertion: 'religiously it is the task of the individual ... to become wholly nothing and thus to exist before God.'<sup>95</sup> Rather than viewing the fulfilment of ethical duty as direct service to God, the religious individual must attempt to transcend the mediation offered by the universal and constantly allow his life to be dominated by the awareness of the absolute. Not to do this is eventually to allow God to disappear altogether. This emphasis had been expressed some years earlier in *Fear and Trembling* (1843):

'The ethical is the universal and as such it is again the divine. One therefore has a right to say that fundamentally every duty is a duty toward God; but if one cannot say more, then one affirms at the same time that properly I have no duty towards God. Duty becomes duty by being referred to God, but in duty itself I do not come into relation with God ... The paradox of faith is that the individual ... determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute.'<sup>96</sup>

For the Kierkegaard of the *Postscript* (1846) it was still possible for the 'bourgeois living room to become a sanctuary',<sup>97</sup> as long as the minutiae of everyday existence were performed in awareness of the absolute. This was the solution summed up by the motto 'hidden inwardness', the bearing of the invisible 'knight of faith' in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard's polemic against 'objectivity' disposed him to



regard institutional change as valueless and irrelevant. The crucial difference between his stance in the pseudonymous works and that set out in his later polemical articles is that, although in neither case are the externals of institutions to be changed, the life of 'hidden inwardness' must give way to one of heroic witness. Neither in his pseudonymous works nor in his explicitly 'Christian' works did Kierkegaard ever claim that he himself was a Christian, but while the pseudonymous works served as a *praeparatio evangelii*, the attack on Christendom proclaimed Kierkegaard's certainty as to the true character of Christian existence. While 'hidden inwardness' was to be characterized by the 'simultaneous maintenance of an absolute relationship to the absolute *telos* and a relative relationship to relative ends',<sup>98</sup> the polemics of Kierkegaard's last years denied the established Church even the status of a 'relative end' because, for him, it had finally accepted the relative as a fitting mediator of the absolute, allowing the need for radical discipleship to be ignored.<sup>99</sup>

For Kierkegaard, what must be absolutely rejected is 'official Christianity, which by suppression and by artifice gives the impression of being the Christianity of the New Testament'.<sup>100</sup> The major distortion of established Christianity stems from its patronage by the state. For Kierkegaard, who gave a crucial and complex role to the idea of authority, the one thousand parsons of Denmark had long since ceased to exercise any genuine religious authority, but rather, by accepting official patronage and payment, had no support but that of the state. His point was not to object to the institution of royal livings, but to point out that its maintenance implied the end of Christian authority as an independent and unworldly force. Kierkegaard's distinction between institutional externals and the state of mind that informed them served for him to avoid any variant of liberal criticism of the nexus of Church and state: 'not only am I no politician, but . . . I hate politics . . . indeed I might be inclined to fight for the clergy, if in a finite sense people want to assail the livings'.<sup>101</sup> The ultimate form of secularization prevails when the established Church comes to have a purely financial relationship to secular power:

'the question about the Established Church is not a religious but a financial question, that what keeps up the Establishment is the 1,000 royally authorized teachers, who, standing to the Establishment in the relation of shareholders, quite rightly are silent about what I talk of, for I have no power to take from them their incomes.'<sup>102</sup>

Kierkegaard's opposition to all forms of official relationship between Church and state is expressed in his condemnation of the Christian state as the abolition of New Testament Christianity:

‘What needs to be explained is that what the state has done and is doing is, if possible, to make Christianity impossible. For the factual situation in our land is, that Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament, not merely does not exist, but, if possible, is made impossible.’<sup>103</sup>

The state’s 1,000 clerical officials are for ever prevented, by the contradictory nature of their situation, from ever teaching New Testament Christianity. This task requires the absolute disjunction of the world and Christian discipleship, an impossibility for any man enjoying an official income. If the mark of authentic Christian existence is to suffer at the hands of the world, then those who enjoy the world’s patronage are devoid of it. For Kierkegaard, there is emphatically no way of making the state Christian – it is an unreformable entity, governed by completely different laws from those of Christian existence. The clearest sign of the state’s utter ineptitude in religion is its attempt to sell eternal blessedness as a service comparable to other social services.<sup>104</sup> The mystical quality which the official link with the Church gives to the state is completely spurious:

‘A Christian ought if possible to be His Majesty’s best subject. But *Christianly*, the king is not the prerogative authority in relation to a kingdom which is not willing at any price to be of this world, come life, come death, will not be of this world.’<sup>105</sup>

For Kierkegaard, once the state’s patronage of Christianity were withdrawn, the number of true Christians would immediately become clear:

‘What Christianity needs is not the suffocating protection of the state; no, it needs fresh air, it needs persecution, and it needs . . . God’s protection . . . above all, save Christianity from the state . . . which has taught Christianity the most disgusting bad habits, as for example, under the name of Christianity to employ the power of the police.’<sup>106</sup>

For Kierkegaard, the dialectic of existence led to Christianity through the most sincere inward labour, overcoming the superficialities of the aesthetic stage, the brittle self-sufficiency of ethics, and the immanence of deism only through the most excruciating awareness of guilt. Christian existence was the fulfilment, in Kierkegaard’s peculiar sense, of human existence, the only solution to the riddle of human nature, and the goal of all authentic spiritual striving. The idea of Christianity as something to be achieved by those capable of the ‘martyrdom of endurance’ depended on an insight into religion as an answer to complex human need as well as a transcendent goal.<sup>107</sup> Because of this, Kierkegaard reacted violently to the identification of the Church with the boundaries of the state, to the automatic creation of a Christian out of

every subject of the king. To reduce Christianity to a corollary of group membership could only stifle the first shoots of genuine Christian existence that might arise in the hearts and minds of the few:

'The most fatal thing of all is to satisfy a want which is not yet felt, so that without waiting till the want is present, one anticipates it, likely also uses stimulants to bring about something which is supposed to be a want, and then satisfies it . . . this is the aim of the whole machinery of the state Church, which under the form of care for men's souls cheats them out of the highest thing in life, that in them there should come into being the concern about themselves, the want . . . instead of this the want (and precisely the coming into being of this want is life's highest significance for a man) does not come into being at all, but having been satisfied long before it came into being, it is prevented from coming into being.'<sup>108</sup>

This passage is an expression of Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity as the apex of the dialectic of existence, which begins even with the simplest attempt of any individual to reflect upon his own situation. To stifle these flickerings of genuine reflection with an externally imposed body of doctrine, backed by political and social authority, is to render impossible any Christian faith grounded in individual decision.<sup>109</sup> The effect of Christendom and of the superficial love of speculation characteristic of the age is that the struggle of genuine existence is never entered into, let alone completed by becoming an individual Christian in contemporaneity: 'The difficulty consists in the fact that the whole age has sunk into the profoundest indifferentism, has no religion whatever, is not even in a condition for religion.'<sup>110</sup>

Kierkegaard's bitter attack on the trivialization of religion as an appendage to bourgeois civilization is summed up in mocking sarcasm;

'the reason why Christ suffered the most frightful agony upon the cross, even being forsaken by God, breathing out His life upon the cross, was in order that we might be encouraged to spend our time, our effort, our power, in enjoying this life wisely and in good taste.'<sup>111</sup>

The 'hidden inwardness' that can convert the most mundane tasks into immediate duty to God is no longer sufficient to fill the need for explicit Christian witness, which must be marked out by a readiness to be seen as alien and eccentric, to depart from the norms of civilization – yet still not externally, not in order to change the world, since it is beyond changing – but to remind the world that it can never absorb Christianity, that Christianity will always be more than a spiritual corollary to accepted secular action. Even a civilization which claims to have achieved a unique harmony of Christian ethics and secular culture must be constantly reminded of the blasphemy of the attempt to limit Christianity's significance to its status as the soul of the civilization of the age.

Kierkegaard's relationship to the Church itself, to the essence of the historical Church which originated in the preaching of the apostles and which was represented in Denmark by Protestantism, was never totally identifiable with his condemnation of Christendom or of the established Church. To reject the church completely was an impossible extreme of the doctrine of contemporaneity, a claim that each believer could come to know Christ by introspection, without the knowledge of revelation transmitted by the Church. Kierkegaard's understanding of religious authority always prevented him from setting himself up as a teacher – his references to himself as a 'fellow student with the age' and as teaching 'without authority' are legion – and from rejecting the authority of the Church as the descendant of the apostles.<sup>112</sup> The doctrine of contemporaneity and the need to recognize a unique source of Christian authority were, then, held in tension. To abolish the Church as the living link with the apostles was to risk reducing Christian existence to a new type of immanentist philosophy that had no need to base itself in history – to a solution to the problems of human existence, the resolution of man's division between temporality and eternity, that took the incarnation as an immediate datum of experience. Even though all the knowledge concerning Christ necessary for saving faith could hypothetically be reduced to the barest facts of his birth, life, death and resurrection, even this skeletal Gospel was transmitted by the Church's authority and by that alone.<sup>113</sup> Kierkegaard's own answer to the problem of the historical Jesus, that had absorbed so much of the attention of the Young Hegelians Strauss and Bauer, was to deny the question any real importance, since if the matter at stake is eternal happiness, no historical research, however painstaking, can ever be sufficiently certain to provide a basis for belief in Christ's life. Such a basis can be provided by the authoritative teaching of the Church alone, even if it is incapable of fulfilling any other role. In his last years Kierkegaard reduced the role of the Church to this barest minimum, sufficient to give the movement to contemporaneity its essential basis in historical witness. The role of the Church was limited to the authoritative transmission of the fact of Christ's existence, while its task of drawing men together into a community of worship was denied validity in Kierkegaard's final admonition to the people of Denmark:

'It is this which it is my duty to say: "Whoever thou art, whatever in other respects thy life may be, by ceasing to take part, (if usually thou dost) in the public worship of God as it now is, thou hast one sin the less, and that a great one".'<sup>114</sup>

Such condemnation was, for Kierkegaard, justified, since the Church's worship no longer had any function besides the legitimation of established social and political institutions.

Like Bauer, Kierkegaard attacked the use of the sacraments as a system of ritual designed to reinforce the corrupting nexus of Church and states.<sup>115</sup> While, for Bauer, baptism and confirmation as presuppositions of citizenship destroyed the possibility of each individual relating to the state as the concrete expression of human *Geist*, for Kierkegaard this use of the sacraments purely as forms of registration of the king's subjects desecrated the meaning of authentic Christian existence, which the sacraments were intended to make possible and to reflect. Yet the state's need of the sacraments as a formal rite of induction is no more anti-Christian than the need society has of the priest, so that 'under the appearance of having Christianity it were to be perfectly reassured of being able to live a life of paganism, a paganism which is moreover tranquillized and refined by the notion that it is Christianity'.<sup>116</sup> For the true Christian, belief is the only possible relationship to revealed truth, and this belief can be proved only by being willing to suffer for one's faith. Christendom has been able to come into existence both because of the notion that Christianity can somehow be improved through the effect of man's own cultural development and the conviction that the world, under the influence of the Church, had grown less evil:

'The merit of "Christendom" is that by the aid of the doctrine that Christendom is perfectible it has transformed Christianity into worldliness. This was the first lie . . . The second lie then is: that the world has now become tolerant, has made progress, for the fact that persecution no longer takes place — the fact that there is nothing to persecute.'<sup>117</sup>

### b. *The Rejection of Liberalism*

Kierkegaard's condemnation of Christendom was the rejection of all forms of sacral conservatism, the refusal to accept the claim that the established institutions of the past could derive any legitimacy from their association with the Church. Kierkegaard's attack on Christendom was specifically an attack on any link whatsoever between Church and state, because such a link always meant the radical secularization of Christianity. Considering all this, it remains to be explained why Kierkegaard also rejected liberalism and indeed all radical movements, conceiving his own message to be totally distinct, having, if possible, more in common with the established Church than with its secular critics. If the worldly forms of established authority had no religious sanction, and if the Church had betrayed its own teaching ever to implicate itself with them, then what could be Kierkegaard's objection to the radical reform of political and ecclesiastical institutions?

The crucial factor in Kierkegaard's vehement rejection of liberalism and all its works was his conviction that the grace of the incarnation was never active within the world of secular history nor in any of the movements that helped to form it. Since sacred history and secular history are two distinct entities, intersecting only at the infinitesimal point of the incarnation, the secular remains unaffected by the sacred, and is for ever incapable of becoming the vehicle of God's purpose. For Hegel, the desire for freedom and rational life characteristic of modern European history derived ultimately from the incarnation, which was itself the objective foundation of the essential unity of sacred and secular history. By rejecting the absolute in favour of human *Geist* (Bauer) or the *Gattungswesen* (Feuerbach) the Young Hegelians had abolished the distinction between sacred and secular history with the result that the traditional goal of sacred history, the salvation of man, became integrated into secular history as the act of radical self-transformation and self-liberation. Secular history was both the field of man's development and the bearer of a future radically different from the past. The complete integration of the religious ideal into the secular sphere was not characteristic of other forms of liberalism, but all shared the conviction that secular history had relevance to man's moral progress, and this was because all, whether religious or atheist, considered secular history to be in some way the vessel of the spirit, whether divine or human. Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation, by contrast, left absolutely no possibility of the movement of history changing the world. The believer related to Christ not from the cultural basis of his own age, but precisely by stripping off all secular culture – and all culture was secular, because no cultural developments could ever explicate, elaborate or amplify the immediate truth of faith, the encounter with the absurdity of the incarnation.

Because the incarnation is relevant only to the individual believer, no historical group can ever claim that its activities are in some way related to its thrust and purpose, nor even that the meaning of the incarnation for sacred history has some parallel in secular history, which can be fulfilled by groups inspired by certain ideals. No movements for secular change can claim any of the grace of the incarnation or indeed even that its goals are in harmony with the meaning of the Christian Gospel, since the event of the incarnation is related to nothing other than the faith of the subjective individual. Any other interpretation must imply that the world is in some way changeable, which, for Kierkegaard, is a denial of one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith – the irreconcilable opposition of spirit and flesh, Christianity and the world. To imply the salvation of the world or even its amelioration by the cumulative force of Christian moral prophecy is to claim that the incarnation can be responded to 'objectively' by groups of people that have not dared to

face the stumbling block of the 'offence'. If the world is capable of authentic change under the influence of the incarnation and its messenger, the Church of the apostles, then this must mean the reintroduction of some form of immanence, since the grace of the incarnation is understood to be active within secular history, to be available – even if only in the form of a better ethical life or a more just society – to those who have never made the attempt to respond to it as the final leap in the dialectic of existence. The incarnation, for Kierkegaard, is in no sense translatable into historical progress, ethical fulfilment or the realization of humanity: to call it so would be to leave it open to the depredations of history and the collective, the two forces intent on destroying the only possible soil for the seed of faith, the subjective individual.

Secular liberalism is of no value because it has no basis in God's design for human existence. The presence of grace within the Church is certainly problematic for Kierkegaard once the Church has begun the fatal compromise known as 'Christendom', but he is certain that grace never influences the behaviour of any other group in history besides the Church. This is all the more true because all liberal and radical movements depended on group or even mass support, and God's purpose can never include any of the activities of what for Kierkegaard is simply 'the crowd'. A movement that depends on interpreting the needs of the age in terms of the needs of the most self-conscious and universal social group is, for Kierkegaard, ethically corrupt. Such movements deprive themselves of the life of the spirit by seeking solutions in the age, in the historical process. The characteristics of the 'crowd' and the 'needs of the age' are parts of a godless whole. The age produces the crowd, those who identify themselves in terms of the characteristics they have in common, those that they all owe to the age. For those who can understand themselves only in terms of the age, only the epithet 'crowd' is suitable. Such a 'crowd' movement develops because it believes that a certain general solution to the problems of existence is valid, drawn from a study of the course of history. By interpreting itself as the present expression of the thrust of history and, more fundamentally, by understanding history itself as crucially significant to the problems of human existence, such a group claims that its goals, whether narrowly selfish or not, are the expression of universal human needs.

For Kierkegaard, the crowd was most typically not the radical groups of the liberal-democratic revolution, nor the anonymous masses of the nascent proletariat, but the well-to-do members of bourgeois society, the environment in which Kierkegaard was born and in which he remained. Although rejecting every form of radical or revolutionary activity, Kierkegaard reserved his most bitter strictures for the conformism of the bourgeoisie. This was symbolized for him by the press,

the instrument by which intellectual apathy was transformed into 'public opinion', an entity which recognized no responsibility, had no ideas of its own, and which was happy to destroy the independence and reputation of those who dared to defy it. For Kierkegaard the demon of 'public opinion', the characteristic of spiritless crowd, had attempted to destroy his particular kind of subjectivity during the *Corsair* affair and it was this harrowing experience, during which his happy relationship with the plebeian population of Copenhagen was undermined, that remained for him the epitome of a conformist civilization, the dismal endpoint of faceless 'objectivity'. Since evil did not stem from institutions, then there was no point in fighting it with institutionally oriented movements. This was simply to succumb to the illusions of externality, the enemy of authentic faith and even of a wholesome ethical life, since, as Kierkegaard had attempted to show in the *Postscript*, the results for ethics of making anything but subjectivity its ground must be disastrous.

Kierkegaard's constant determination to avoid any identification of his own attack on the established Church with that of the liberals has already been discussed. Yet his own critique, which insisted that the livings themselves were irrelevant to the problem, and at the same time attacked the nexus of Church and state which made the livings possible, was marred by inconsistency. To retain the livings meant the rejection of the ideal of evangelical poverty, which Kierkegaard never considered to be binding and never applied to his own situation, but at the same time he demanded a life style radically different from that of the secular world, which could transcend the devalued content of 'hidden inwardness'.

Kierkegaard's attack on the phenomenon of the 'crowd' and the liberal and radical movements that accompanied it was intensified by his conviction that his prophecies had been fulfilled by the events of 1848. For him, his own estimate of the crowd, which had once seemed exaggerated, had been shown by these events not to be strong enough. His category of the individual, once considered the oddest, had been proven the only one sufficient to hold out in the crisis.

'If the crowd is the Evil, if chaos is what threatens us, there is salvation only in one thing, in becoming a single individual, in the thought of "that individual" as an essential category. One triumph I have experienced, and one only, but that satisfied me absolutely, so that as a thinker I demand nothing more in this world.'<sup>118</sup>

The events of 1848 had brought forth 'unripe visionary men as the bewildered spokesmen of bewildering thoughts', whose motivations and solutions were not only false, but fundamentally ungodly. The opposition of the individual and the crowd was for Kierkegaard one expression



of his fundamental ideas: 'the individual in contrast to "the public" . . . a thought in which is contained an entire philosophy of life and of the world'.<sup>119</sup>

For Kierkegaard, the new freedom which secular movements attempt to introduce is one related to the fantastic notion of man as a species-being who derives his dignity from his supposed unity with the divine in history. Such a movement cannot be from God, since God communicates only with the individual who is prepared to abandon all that might be considered worthy in human nature. The freedom based on the concept of a species-being and the universal love that this is assumed to make possible is, for Kierkegaard, fundamentally opposed to the Christian concept:

'One wishes in relation to love, to teach man something entirely new, something for which the now outmoded Holy Scriptures already have the significant expression — one wishes to teach men the liberty which is "without God in the world"'.<sup>120</sup>

This attempt to set men up with the rights of God 'will tend more and more to transform the whole of existence into doubt and turmoil'. For Kierkegaard, those who lead the crowd reveal their contempt for the individual by depending on the idea of man as a species being. The lie that success in transforming society is made much more likely by united effort depends on a doctrine of human nature that is incapable of offering any worthwhile model of the future. The understanding of man as a species being

'does away with man's kinship with deity . . . and puts in its place the modern (or . . . the old pagan) notion that to be a man is to belong to a race endowed with reason, to belong to it as a specimen, so that the race or species is higher than the individual, which is to say that there are no more individuals but only specimens.'<sup>121</sup>

The use of number and majorities as a guide to truth may, for Kierkegaard, have some relevance to politics and the determination of empirical matters, but 'becomes untruth when it is transferred to the intellectual, the spiritual, the religious fields'.<sup>122</sup> The Christian commandment is to love one's neighbour, but to love the 'crowd' or to love man as a species being is for Kierkegaard simply the path to authority or to material advantage. All the revolts against authority in the worldly sphere are a unity with the revolts against God attempted by those who replace Christian faith with the debased products of the doctrine of immanentism. The idea of the union of God and the species had become the justification for the confusion of *vox populi* with *vox dei*. Christianity had become something not to be believed in the fear of God, but

something that must satisfy the *Zeitgeist*. The illusion of the 'crowd' and of the leaders of all radical movements is that they are sufficiently intimate with the process of history to know the needs of the age. Yet nothing distances man more effectively from his real needs than the desire to satisfy the imagined needs of the age, which are figments of the corrupt historical imagination:

'What . . . the age *needs* in the deepest sense can be said fully and completely with one single word: it needs . . . eternity. The misfortune of our time is just this, that it has become simply nothing else but time, the temporal, which is impatient of hearing anything about eternity and so (with the best of intentions or furiously) would make eternity quite superfluous by means of a cunningly devised counterfeit, which, however, in all eternity will not succeed.'<sup>123</sup>

### 3. KIERKEGAARD'S CHRISTIAN UTOPIA

Kierkegaard's understanding of the relationship between Christianity and society attempted to avoid the alternatives that had been posed in Germany in the early 1840's: the conservative ideology of a romantized Christendom, supported by Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his ministers, and the radical republicanism of the Young Hegelians, based on the philosophy of man as a species being. For Kierkegaard, the necessity of developing a totally different insight into society's needs resulted from his own emphasis on the radical distinction between inwardness and externality, on the irrelevance of institutional forms to the ethical status and God-relationship of individuals. By attempting a devastating critique of Christendom which at the same time avoided any suggestion of reforming the outward forms of ecclesiastical life, Kierkegaard proposed a Christian social philosophy which owed nothing to liberalism. His solution to the events of the age, in particular to the upheavals of 1848, was the attempt to reject all secular radicalism while simultaneously affirming the complete absence of any sacred foundations for established political and social institutions. The single criterion in social analysis was for Kierkegaard the possibility of an authentic God-relationship for the isolated individual.

In his short work *The Present Age* Kierkegaard attempted a reflective judgement of the movements of the age, deriving dialectical benefit out of its evil tendencies. In an epoch besotted with speculation and fearful of cutting itself loose from the immoral cult of history, Kierkegaard finds the hope for the possibility of authentic faith in the destruction of traditional society that godless liberalism will bring about. The present age, unlike the revolutionary age which preceded it, does not overcome

the past by destructive action, as a 'reflective and passionless age it does exactly the contrary: it *hinders and stifles* all action; it levels. Levelling is a silent, mathematical and abstract occupation which shuns upheavals.'<sup>124</sup> The goal of this levelling is equality, but in the spiritual sphere such equality represents 'the victory of abstraction over the individual'.<sup>125</sup> Under the influence of the levelling process, the individual 'no longer belongs to God . . . he is conscious of belonging in all things to an abstraction to which he is subjected by reflection'.<sup>126</sup> The egalitarian dream posits the creation of 'humanity pure and unalloyed' but all that the levelling process is capable of encouraging is the formation of the public, abstract humanity in a negative and farcical form, held together by the power of the press: 'unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization – and yet are held together as a whole.'<sup>127</sup> Such a public 'is everything and nothing, the most dangerous of all powers and the most insignificant'.<sup>128</sup> The destruction of all traditional institutions, of all those organic forms that oriented the lives of individuals, will not produce man as a realized species being, since such a phenomenon can have no existence, being only a product of abstract thought, but rather a featureless social wasteland, in which the individual will be able to find his bearings only by searching for a link with the infinite, a link that could not be forged in the past, when the security of established patterns of life prevented it.

The contemporary attempt to found a new humanity on the 'idea of association' is condemned to failure, although it is the negative force through which society must pass before each individual is capable of understanding his own uniqueness:

'association is the scepticism which is necessary in order that the development of individuality may proceed uniformly, so that the individual will either be lost or, disciplined by such abstractions, will find himself religiously.'<sup>129</sup>

The principle of association attempts to strengthen man by force of number, but its effect is to weaken him ethically: 'It is only after the individual has acquired an ethical outlook, in face of the whole world, that there can be any suggestion of really joining together.'<sup>130</sup> The illusory fulfilment of the principle of association, destroying all the ancient certainties that were the basis of a stable consciousness, will throw into ever starker relief the overriding need for each individual to find an infinite guarantee for his own life, a guarantee that will not suffer the fate of those traditional certainties that were destroyed by the fever of the levellers. Those individuals who are capable of perceiving the emptiness at the core of the new abstract humanity will understand more deeply

than ever the uniqueness of divine security: 'the development is in spite of everything a progress because all the individuals who are saved will receive the specific weight of religion, its essence at first hand, from God himself'.<sup>131</sup>

To interpret the present and future with the aid of this dialectic is not to lend support to the spokesmen of radicalism,

'who are the servants of the powers of evil, for levelling itself does not come from divinity and all good men will at times grieve over its desolation, but divinity allows it and desires to bring the highest into relation with the individual.'<sup>132</sup>

In this process, the individual will turn in vain for help to those men of traditional power and prestige who dominated the institutions of the old world. The nemesis of revolution was brought down on these men by their reliance on worldly force, their desire to resist change without the self-criticism required to develop a new inner justification for their power. The collapse of established power is as complete as the collapse of cultural certainty, wrought by the 'forest fire of abstraction' implicit in the ideas of 'humanity' and the 'numerical equality of man and man'.<sup>133</sup>

Those who will carry out God's purpose in the future wasteland of social and cultural monotony are those who are capable of drawing the right conclusion from the religious equality of man. Rejecting the use of secular power and authority, these men will attempt to point out to those individuals who show their readiness the eternal certainty of the religious relationship. They themselves will not resist the levelling process, even though its intentions are evil, since to act with any kind of authority would be to betray their own self-effacing role as signposts to the possibility of faith. Instead, they 'will overcome it in suffering and in that way express once more the law of (their) existence, which is not to dominate, to guide, to lead, but to serve in suffering and help indirectly.'<sup>134</sup> By refusing any form of authority, these 'unrecognizable ones' will attempt the difficult task of eliminating all obstacles in the way of the individual's act of faith. To engage in direct teaching and leadership would be to destroy this possibility, since it would soon make of the teacher himself a new mediation of religious knowledge, the contrary of immediate faith. Compulsion will be exerted by the 'unrecognizable one' only upon himself, to fit himself for the task of understanding the forces at work in the age and pointing out the possibilities for faith implicit in them. The success of his work will be precisely in the liberation of each individual from every influence, every sort of guidance and security other than that which comes directly from God. The 'unrecognizable one' himself can offer no direct help,

'for God's love is not a second-hand gift . . . nor shall any of the unrecognizable presume to help directly or to speak directly or to teach directly at the head of the masses, in order to direct their decisions, instead of giving his negative support and so helping the individual to make the decision which he himself has reached.'<sup>135</sup>

The 'unrecognizable one' will have no religious authority, but will be capable of providing an example to others through the strength of his lived insight into faith as the 'highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity'. The 'unrecognizable one' transcends the secular power that invited its own downfall at the hands of godless radicalism, but he concedes genuine authority to the 'apostle', the man who lives according to a direct command from God. While secular liberalism and radicalism derives its justification from a false immanentism and the 'unrecognizable one' from his ability to perceive the essence of authentic religion, the apostle is a witness to the direct intervention of God in worldly affairs. In his *Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle* (1847), Kierkegaard contrasts immanence and transcendence, the insights available to man within history and those granted to him in divine revelation. The genius and the apostle are to be distinguished in the same way as the sphere of immanence and the sphere of transcendence. The work of the genius is finally assimilated in the course of history, but the apostle teaches something, 'the newness of which, precisely because it is essentially paradoxical and not an anticipation in relation to the development of the race, always remains'.<sup>136</sup> This 'essential paradox' is the 'protest against immanence', the destroyer of the illusion that the divine intervention in history can ever be made a part of history continuous with all other parts. By defying both speculative reason and the assumed immanence of the eternal in the historical, the apostle, by the use of the paradox, relativizes history and all the groups in it that claim the allegiance of the individual. The apostle is not characterized by his gifts, but only by his call. His message is not accessible to aesthetic or philosophic categories, and remains unique even when it is capable of being understood by those who do not accept it. To speak of the apostle's message as 'profound' is to commit blasphemy, since it refuses to be complimented by the categories of immanence.

For Kierkegaard, both the genius and the apostle present great offense to the ideas of the age. Since the genius recognizes no higher purpose, no relationship of his genius to general ends, he confounds the preference of the age for the concentration of all forces upon a collective historical goal: 'The dialectic of genius will give particular offense in our times, where the masses, the many, the public, and other such abstractions contrive to turn everything topsy-turvy'.<sup>137</sup> The apostle, in contrast, has an absolute purpose, has no substantial personality apart

from his purpose, since his own attributes are irrelevant to his God-given message. His purpose is to provide a corrective to the age by pointing out the unique source of authority in God. The idea of the apostle is the cornerstone of Kierkegaard's social thought, since only the apostle possesses genuine authority. While the leaders of the past squandered their authority by their reliance on physical force, and the leaders of modern mass movements base their authority on the general will, the devourer of individuality, the apostle points to the source of all authority in God. Only the apostle can legitimately be differentiated from other men – by his call. All other differences are strictly within the sphere of immanence and any authority based on these differences is limited to the sphere of immanence: 'Authority is inconceivable within the sphere of immanence, or else it can only be thought of as something transitory.'<sup>138</sup> 'Between man and man no *established* or continuous authority is conceivable.'<sup>139</sup> Religious authority is an Archimedean point from which all traditional hierarchies and all appeals to new foundations of power in the masses may be judged wanting.

By developing the concept of the apostle, Kierkegaard once again minimizes the effect of the incarnation on secular history, re-asserting the constant need for divine transcendence to intervene in a way that breaks up all the patterns of human experience. But the apostle implies a criticism not only of all secular power (or, indeed, of the impossibility of any secular power) but also of the role and authority of the Church. To emphasize the uniqueness of the apostle affirms the impotence of all institutions that have played any part in secular history and which must function within the sphere of immanence. Although far from asserting the likelihood of a new direct revelation, or even explicitly stating the contemporary need for the apostolic role, Kierkegaard's concentration on the apostle's distinctiveness as the authentic source of religious authority parallels his attack on the Church as bereft of any genuine relationship to transcendence. In a similar way, the 'unrecognizable one', although 'without authority' – like Kierkegaard's self-understanding – must also witness to the inadequacy of the Church, since his role is the denial of the possibility of religious authority apart from the immediate intervention of the divine. The 'unrecognizable one' can do nothing to teach or guide others towards faith, but only provide an example of religious individuality. To assert that this activity is the only hope for the future individual is to accept that the explicit and visible religious authority of the Church has been exhausted by its involvement with the world, and that no form of mediation can ever benefit the Christian faith.

While destroying the religious basis of traditional secular authority, Kierkegaard remained satisfied that the maintenance of this authority

was justified, since, although it bore all the marks of arbitrariness, it made no appeal to the universal, ruling with complete self-sufficiency. To isolate worldly authority in the monarch meant that each individual was free from the attentions of those mass movements that desired to enlist him as an infinitesimal component of the general will. This social philosophy was partly an expression of Kierkegaard's purely personal preferences, the whims of a man whose relative affluence and private intellectual pursuits had no need of the help of the collective:

'Of all forms of government the monarchical is the best, more than any other it favors and protects the private gentleman's quiet conceits and innocent pranks. Only democracy, the most tyrannical form of government, obliges everyone to take a positive part, as the societies and general assemblies of our time often enough remind one.'<sup>140</sup>

Although the monarchy could claim no divine right, there was no better alternative, and no hope of any improvement by institutional change: 'not a single new official is necessary, nor the discharge of any old one, but perhaps on inward transformation which would consolidate the state in the fear of God.'<sup>141</sup>

Kierkegaard's radical dissolution of all human difference as belonging merely to the sphere of immanence was equally irrelevant to the attainment of worldly equality. While having considerable sympathy and affection for the plebeian population of Copenhagen, and attempting constantly to relate to them in equality, Kierkegaard attacked all those who drew any secular consequences from religious equality:

'I had a real Christian satisfaction in the thought that, if there were no other, there was definitely one man in Copenhagen whom every poor man could freely accost and converse with on the street . . . who made a practical effort on a small scale to learn the lesson of loving one's neighbour and, alas, got at the same time a frightful insight into what an illusion Christendom is and . . . an insight also into what a situation the simpler classes suffered themselves to be seduced into by paltry newspaperwriters, whose strangle or fight for equality (since it is in the service of a lie) cannot lead to any other result but to prompt the privileged classes in self-defence to stand proudly aloof from the common man, and to make the common man insolent in his forwardness.'<sup>142</sup>

In his *Works of Love* (1847), Kierkegaard discussed the relationships between worldly differences and Christian equality. The Christian commandment to love one's neighbour indiscriminately is not, for Kierkegaard, a religious equivalent to a universalist humanism. The Christian does not love the 'pure man', but man as he exists, with all the differences of body, wealth, education and status that are prevalent in the world. The humanist 'pure man' is non-existent and is not identical with

the 'neighbour'.<sup>143</sup> All earthly differences, the inevitable concomitants of human existence, 'must continue to tempt every man who comes into the world. For by being a Christian he is not exempt from the differences, but by triumphing over the temptation of the differences, he becomes Christian.'<sup>144</sup> For the Christian earthly differences are not in themselves evil, but only the passions of pride and envy that they arouse. Christianity knows 'that earthly busyness and the false prophets of worldliness will conjure up this appearance of equality in the name of Christianity',<sup>145</sup> but it perceives that the evils aroused by these differences are active in the poor as well as in the rich and powerful. The search for worldly equality is both in vain and anti-Christian, 'Christianity on the contrary, by the help of the short cut of eternity, is immediately at the goal; it allows the differences to continue, but it teaches the equality of eternity.'<sup>146</sup> The commandment to love one's neighbours bears witness to the Christian determination to ignore all worldly differences in the light of eternity.

The Christian does not concern himself with 'abolishing this or that discrimination . . . but is devoutly concerned in interpenetrating his own difference with the saving thought of Christian equality.'<sup>147</sup> To sin against the love of neighbour is so to observe worldly differences that every man's 'kinship with all men, with every man unconditionally' is denied. To form any kind of exclusive union, any association which marks itself off from the rest of humanity, is to accept the worldly differences as binding. For Kierkegaard only the constant elevation of the God-relationship above all other bonds can preserve the indiscriminate love of neighbour. The immediate link with God is the destruction of all natural ties, the complete isolation of the individual, which at the same time places him at the disposal of all men without exception:

'only through loving one's neighbour can a man accomplish the highest; for the highest consists in being capable of being used as an instrument in the hand of Providence . . . everyone who has placed himself at some other point, everyone who forms parties or factions, or joins such, he steers on his own responsibility, and all his achievement, even if it were the transformation of the world, is a delusion.'<sup>148</sup>

Kierkegaard's Christian utopia is, then, a world outwardly identical with the *status quo* of privilege and inequality, but in which the force of religious inwardness is so strong that the religious equality of men is constantly felt. Man's temporal life and his hope for salvation are to be sealed off from each other to the extent that the religious equality of man, and the commandment to indiscriminate love of neighbour, can exercise absolutely no influence on the radical differences between the social conditions of life of man and man. Christianity can never wish



to overcome the world, since it knows that the world is essentially un-reformable, impervious to the influence of the incarnation. Its highest hope for the world is to intensify the consciousness of essential equality in every man, so that the sphere of temporal differences will exercise less and less hold and cease to be an occasion of temptation to pride and envy:

'Christianity does not abolish the differences, but it wants the difference to hang loosely about the individual, loosely, like the cape the king casts off to reveal himself; loosely, like the ragged cloak in which a supernatural being has concealed himself. When the difference hangs thus loosely, then that essential other is always glimpsed in every individual, that common to all, that eternal resemblance, the equality. If it were this way, if every individual lived in this way, then would the temporal existence have attained its highest point . . . It cannot be like eternity; but this expectant solemnity, which, without halting the course of life, renews itself every day through the eternal and through the equality of eternity, everyday saves itself from the differences in which it still continues: this would be the reflection of eternity.'<sup>149</sup>

Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* had attempted to show that the ethical sphere was incapable of self-sustaining existence. The ethical ideal had collapsed under the burden of historical sin. By responding to the incarnation in faith, the individual had cast off this burden. Yet if the natural sources of ethics had failed, if reliance purely on the 'universal' must finally lead to despair over man's sinfulness, then how was the Christian, once he had made 'the movement of infinity', to re-construct the norms of ethical behaviour? Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* attempts to provide an answer to this question by constant emphasis upon Christian love – the fountainhead of Christian ethics – as a divine commandment. The love that each man has for his fellow man consequent upon their common humanity has, for Kierkegaard, been revealed to be a failure, and the attempts of his contemporary Feuerbach to re-furbish this idea received his most stringent censure.

By speaking of love as a duty, Kierkegaard attempted to re-create ethics from within the explicitly religious sphere of existence. Employing an analytical scepticism that often recurs in his works, Kierkegaard set about undermining the foundations of a natural morality in order to present once more his either/or of transcendent, paradoxical faith and unregenerate worldliness. As he wrote of himself in *The Point of View*:

'I could not possibly succeed in striking the comforting and secure *via media* in which most people pass their lives: I had either to cast myself into perdition and sensuality, or to choose the religious absolutely as the only thing – either the world in a measure that would be dreadful, or the cloister.'<sup>150</sup>

The attempts of the philosophy of immanence to provide a natural and rational foundation for ethics were illusory, just as they had been shown to be in theology and politics. A moral law founded in the consensus of the human race must be valueless firstly because such a consensus can never be assembled, being simply a mask for the preferences of the age, and secondly because the mere fact of a quasi-universal consensus can carry no binding power over those individuals who think differently.<sup>151</sup> The Christian commandment 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour', by contrast, owes nothing to a consensus, to nature or to any version of the doctrine of immanence. It is nothing else but a divine commandment, and as such is proof against all the objections made to the notion of natural law, given that the individual is disposed to accept its divine origin and, indeed, the existence of a divinity. For Kierkegaard, then, ethics is only genuinely possible in the context of faith. The religious individual does not share a common natural ethics with the atheistic humanist, or even the deist, that can be notionally distinguished from his faith. The natural unity of man and man proposed by Feuerbach is for Kierkegaard quite an unwarranted assumption: 'If it were not a duty to love then the concept of neighbour would not exist.'<sup>152</sup> Divine command gives ethics an eternally solid foundation which avoids all the *non sequiturs* of universalist humanism: 'Thou shalt love: only when it is a duty to love, only then is love everlastingly secure against every change; everlastingly emancipated in blessed independence; everlastingly happy, assured against despair.'<sup>153</sup> The individual's God-relationship is crucial to his relationship with his fellow-man: God must always be the 'middle term' in any union of human beings in love. This meant that Christianity was the enemy of all forms of humanism that claimed a natural bond of love existed between man and man. To reach out into the world of other men, the individual must go by way of faith in God, ridding his own life of despair at the collapse of nature, and grounding his own social being in the eternal.<sup>154</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

## 1. RELIGION AND ATHEISTIC HUMANISM IN THE CRITIQUE OF HEGEL

For Hegel, the truth of religion, as the relationship of man to the infinite which sustained him and gave his life context and meaning, had been vindicated by the outcome of the Enlightenment. Those versions of humanism which had proclaimed man to be utterly self-sufficient and self-determining had shown their sterility in the destructiveness of the Robespierrian Terror. The rationalistic negativity of the Enlightenment had failed to see that beneath the superstitious exterior of Christianity lay the metaphysical presuppositions of the ideas of freedom and justice. Man's relationship to the eternal was not alienation, as the radical Enlightenment had argued, but the foundation of man's historical existence: only a union of 'pure insight' with belief could allow man to achieve a correct relationship to history, to realize that the subjective will was only one factor in the construction of a social whole. The one-sidedness of the Enlightenment and of religious other-worldliness cried out for a humanism that was aware of its own foundations in the eternal – not the eternal of the deists, that had nothing to do with man's own history, but an eternal which had taken unto itself the pain of the world, which had united itself with the history of man. For Hegel, rather than being necessarily a denial of God, humanism could be given an explicitly Christian content since human self-confidence and creativity was the enactment through the medium of the finite will and subjectivity of the substantial unity of God and His creation achieved by Jesus Christ in the incarnation. This humanism was arrived at through philosophical reflection on the interdependence of finite and infinite and the contemplation of the working of divine reason in history.<sup>1</sup>

What Hegel's radical disciples and critics in the 1840's denied was the coherence of any concept of humanism which differed from that of the radical Enlightenment. How could man be self-affirming and self-liberating yet dependent on grace and concentrating all his hopes and prayers on eternal blessedness? The central problem in these varying refutations of Hegel's synthesis was the relationship between God and human history. If man related to a transcendent God, he must neces-

sarily alienate himself from his own historical fate and that of the community he lived in; if man sought fulfilment in the temporal and corruptible world, he committed the sin of reducing the hope for salvation to a social utopia. These antinomies, in the context of the social and political polarization leading up to the 1848 revolution, meant that Christian belief and the programmes of republicanism and socialism that derived from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had no common cause in Germany. Although this was not true in France or England, the derivation of Marxism from the thought of the Young Hegelians meant that the historically most significant form of socialism had its philosophical foundations in an atheistic humanism.

Kierkegaard and Bauer affirmed the irreconcilability of Christianity and Enlightenment from opposite points of view but in remarkably similar language. For both, much of the untruth in Hegel was his attempt to reconcile, to see unity where there could only be struggle. Only by concentration on the irreconcilability of the purity of truth with the needs and demands of the masses or the 'crowd' could the *Kritiker* or believer do justice to his cause. For Bauer, radical negation of the Christian past was the way to freedom, a negation which knew no compromise, while for Kierkegaard:

'Either/or is the word before which the folding doors fly open and the ideals appear – O blissful sight. Either/or is the token which insures entrance into the unconditional – God be praised. Yea, either/or is the key to heaven. On the other hand, what is, what was and continues to be man's misfortune? It is this "to a certain degree"'2

For Kierkegaard and for Bauer a strong faith was made possible only by the collapse of culture and civilization. Kierkegaard's affirmation in *The Present Age* that the destruction of the traditional social organism by the leveller will finally result in a new possibility for genuinely individual faith had much in common with Bauer's contention that Christianity, the most intense form of religious alienation, was born in the destruction of the ancient cultures by Roman militarism. Faith, for Kierkegaard, and religious alienation, for Bauer, was the concomitant of social disintegration and the denigration of the possibility of satisfying human community. For both, the Feuerbachian ideal of man as a *Gattungswesen*, as primarily to be understood as part of a social whole, was the chief enemy: the truth had nothing to do with the *praxis* of the masses, and was never purer than at its source in the lonely prophesy of the radical intellectual.

What determined the religious and political attitudes of the critics of Hegel was their answer to the fundamental problem of the relationship between faith in God and participation in the self-determining process

of secular history. For Schelling and Kierkegaard, a concern with secular history was irrelevant or inimical to an authentic relationship to divine truth. They were therefore apprehensive of the events of 1848, seeing in them a rejection of God as well as of human authority. Rather than seeing new possibilities of liberation in the demand for a democratic republic or the incipient organisation of the working masses, they understood them to be a destructive denial of the limitations of historical existence. In response to these secular demands, Kierkegaard affirmed the God-relationship of the individual and Schelling the sublime truths of revelation that were independent of the corrupted world of history. Their rejection of Hegel was also a rejection of political humanism since they believed that Hegel had done the greatest injustice both to religion and to the understanding of the quality of existence itself by attempting to harmonize God, the individual and political society in history. Their understanding of God's existence as irreducibly transcendent both to reason and to history meant that secular history itself could contain little of importance for them. While Schelling's attitudes to politics had some elements in common with the Christian romanticism of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, Kierkegaard succeeded in rejecting all versions of conservatism and radicalism in politics, concentrating all his hopes on the faith of the individual that would become possible once the political storms of the age had blown themselves and all of traditional society to destruction.

For Bauer, any notion of a God transcendent to history must be a denigration of history, a sign of man's own utter self-abasement. Belief in God was a process of alienation through which man denied the value of his own history and creativity and related to an infinite which had the sole function of reducing all human values to worthlessness. For Feuerbach, a religion which was given 'theological' rather than 'anthropological' content must be equally alienating from the concrete world of natural human relationships. Feuerbach's attempt to retain the language and function of religion as the foundation of a new humanism which elevated the species to a type of transcendence for the individual was developed by Hess and Ruge. For them, Hegel's derivation of history from the *Weltgeist* was invalid since history itself was no longer seen to be at all rational. For Ruge, its irrationality was most clear in the preoccupation of the Prussian monarchy with Romantic notions of kingship and in the increasing repression of free thought. Hegel's belief that the reforms of vom Stein and Hardenberg represented the germ of a stable *Rechtsstaat* was, for Ruge, proved false by the apparent ease with which Romanticism once more rose to power in political and intellectual life. For Hess, the increase in social misery brought about by liberal economic policies and industrialization made nonsense of any claim that a genuine reconciliation was implicit in historical reality.<sup>3</sup>

For both Ruge and Hess, history could not be related to the will of God because history's products were inhumane. The Hegelian concept of the *Weltgeist* implied for them a resigned acceptance of history, but history itself was grievously at odds with the truth of human nature, with the character of man as a self-determining moral agent. The dignity of human existence implied rejection of any belief in a God who blesses 'what is'. Instead, introspection provided an ideal of humane existence which could be realized by practical-critical action. Religion itself could be retained, in its 'anthropological' sense, as the pathos of utopia. Religion as a relation to a transcendent God was necessarily alienation from the historical tasks of the present, while the rejection of God brought with it the realization that the sole content of religion was its stimulus to social man to bring about a realm of freedom.

Schelling and Kierkegaard, too, rejected any possibility of a humanism which combined worship of a transcendent God with social action directed towards the creation of a world of justice and freedom. Their rejection of Hegel's union of God and history was closely tied to their affirmation of the radical discontinuity between God and human reason: for both Schelling and Kierkegaard a rational proof of the existence of God was impossible, since existence itself is never subject to demonstration. A proof for the existence of God only demonstrated the internal consistency of human logic, and could not go beyond the circle of logic to existence itself. The true role of reason was to 'seek a thought it cannot think',<sup>4</sup> not to assume that God's life was a copy of its own patterns. God's transcendence to reason was also a transcendence to history, although Schelling and Kierkegaard understood this in very different ways. While Schelling attempted to retain something of the idealist notion of theogony and at the same time make God utterly self-possessing, Kierkegaard rejected any notion of God's involvement with human history outside the instant of the incarnation. Hegel's doctrine of necessary theogony was alien to them since they understood it as reducing God to an object of reason and to a *Weltgeist*. God's independence from history meant that man's actions within secular history, his search for the historical realization of just and free community, were not relevant to the worship of God.

Hegel had achieved a reconciliation of religion and Enlightenment by an emphasis on philosophy itself as the faculty which discerned the relationships between man's actions and God's will in history. Philosophy could demonstrate that human autonomy and religious worship were not irreconcilable because it preserved its own independence from particular life-styles, presupposing all the forms of historical action but remaining independent of them. Neither the believer totally involved in the worship of God through image and feeling nor the man of action

immersed in his socio-historical tasks could be aware of the universal significance of his actions, nor have any understanding of their one-sidedness. Only the philosopher, who himself necessarily came after the event, could see the unity that did prevail in these opposites. Those thinkers in the 1840's who rejected Hegel's Christian humanism rejected also his emphasis on philosophy: to choose one or other of the alternatives that he had seen as complementary parts of a whole meant also to choose the activity either of faith or of social liberation, which necessarily subordinated philosophical contemplation to the categories of will, commitment and moral passion. Whereas Hegel had seen the truth of Christian humanism as emerging at the end of the crucial struggles of history, his disciples and critics in the 1840's understood their own age as an age of crisis, crisis which could only be resolved by whole-hearted commitment to a gospel of action.

For these thinkers the priority of action and commitment was oriented towards a future which was, in varying ways, a denial and reversal of the present.<sup>5</sup> The crisis of their own age could be resolved only through dedication to a future whose discontinuity with the present was a guarantee of its purity and a stimulus to action. For Bauer, the radical negation of Christianity would introduce an age of Enlightenment more transformative than any ideological revolution in previous experience; for Ruge, the most practical of the Young Hegelians, the union of Hegelian idealism with the moral activism of the Enlightenment could be the foundation of a democratic republic which would go beyond the bounds of purely economic liberalism and romanticized private life to achieve true citizenship; for Hess, social man could finally overcome the tensions of 'pre-history' and relate to his neighbour without the mediation of the state or of capital; for Schelling, the Johannine Church of the future would fulfil the trinitarian evolution of man's religious history, calling man to an ideal spiritual communion; for Kierkegaard, radical witness might make possible a return to primitive Christianity once men's obsession with their own history had worked itself out in destruction. These thinkers of the 1840's rejected Hegel from radically opposed standpoints yet had in common a desire to transcend philosophical contemplation of historical necessity through ethical and spiritual action. For them, independence from historical necessity meant freedom to realize an ideal form of life, whether social or religious, which was projected as a future possibility. This independence was achieved by rejecting Hegel's thesis that God had identified himself with the course and products of history, and by concentrating on either the worship of a transcendent God or the realization within history of a social ideal presented in language borrowed from religious eschatology.

The failure of the revolution of 1848 ended this utopian mood: the defeat of democracy, the growth of material prosperity and the increasing dominance of utilitarian and materialist thought helped to form a new cultural pattern in Germany which denied the significance of the problems which had concerned Hegel and his disciples and critics in the 1840's. Religion continued to identify itself with the well-being of bourgeois society, in defiance of Kierkegaard. Not till the first world war did a new crisis in the relations of religion and society arise, and with it a belated discovery of his thought. By returning to Hegel's methodology of discerning the rational in the real, Marx abandoned Young Hegelian thought, while retaining its interpretation of religion and its necessary association of humanism with the denial of God. Historical materialism gave Marx's thought a strength which allowed it to survive long after the failure of the hopes of 1848, but at the same time subjected the hope of liberation, the *freie Geistesstat*, once again to historical necessity.

## 2. THE AMBIVALENCE OF HEGEL'S SYNTHESIS OF HISTORY AND THE ABSOLUTE

Hegel's unique interpretation of the relationship of infinite and finite, of the absolute and the subjective will, gave him the philosophical means to unite religious faith and secular action, yet its particular characteristics do offer some explanation why this unity was so unstable and why those who rejected such a unity — the Young Hegelians, Kierkegaard and the late Schelling in particular — employed so many arguments in common from radically different perspectives. By restricting ethical action to the cultivation and enactment of established values and denying the rights of moral reason to elaborate a future through criticism of the present, Hegel compelled those of his disciples who found themselves in a state which had abandoned Hegel's own principles to formulate new attitudes to history and to the future, rejecting the meaningfulness of the 'cunning of reason' and affirming the rights of the subjective moral consciousness to transform reality in its own image. By doing so, they necessarily implied that reason and freedom were no longer inherent in the historical process itself, but were rather ideals derived from introspection into the human spirit, which was itself the only consciousness in existence. If history had shown itself to be lacking in rationality, then the *Weltgeist* did not exist and the conscious purposes of man were once more the only means of achieving those goals that Hegel had ascribed to the spirit of history.<sup>6</sup> The affirmation of moral subjectivity by the Young Hegelians was therefore linked to



atheism: the human subject did not derive its dignity from its relationship with the creative omnipotence of the divine subject, but understood itself as free to create and sustain itself, making a world radically open to the 'revaluation of all values'.

Kierkegaard, too, rejected the notion of the *Weltgeist* from the point of view of subjectivity: not because he wished to realize human values of reason and freedom in a secular world but because the *Weltgeist* abolished the possibility of a uniquely personal relationship to the transcendent God. If God was immanent in history, then the individual had no more status than the historical process gave him, that is, he had the formal rights of subjectivity but his own uniqueness, his 'natural particularity', was necessarily irrelevant. The Young Hegelians and Kierkegaard both appealed to a species of transcendence against Hegel's doctrine of immanence. Since the Young Hegelians accepted Hegel's interpretation of Christianity as the manifestation of God in and through the human consciousness and human history, they necessarily rejected Christian belief altogether once they had become convinced that Hegel's doctrine of reason in history and its concomitant emphasis on philosophical resignation was false. Their atheistic humanism clearly rejected religious transcendence but gave to the human self-consciousness the right to formulate through philosophical and social criticism ethical ideals which transcended the content of the present world.

Hegel's doctrine, then, was interpreted both as Promethean atheism and as a reduction of human nature to a mere epiphenomenon of the divine life-process. The weakness of his doctrine of God and man was that it neither clarified the nature of human freedom nor the distinction between God and his creation. If man's spiritual activity was God's coming to self-consciousness, and if philosophy in particular could think God as he really is, then the human mind need not recognize anything in the universe beyond its own range and power. For Bauer, since the subjective self-consciousness was the source of knowledge and freedom which experienced only opposition and conflict from historical reality, there could be no doubt that there was no higher truth than man's own self-consciousness immanent in historical substance. If man was the medium in which God came to self-consciousness, he was the only entity that was consciously Godlike — he had no need to search beyond his own powers for the infinite. Once the historical and natural world outside man's own will was seen no longer as the work of God that demanded comprehension and acceptance, as it had been by Hegel, but rather as brute matter that attempted to suppress free consciousness and demanded re-moulding, then the presence of 'the spirit' was not accepted in any medium outside the human mind.

The subjective consciousness that attempted to impose its own pro-

jects on the historical world was a phenomenon that Hegel had described and criticized in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, yet the combination of a new and more repressive historical situation with his own doctrine of the realization of God in the highest works of the human spirit meant that it emerged once more as an interpretation of his philosophy. Hegel's assurance that 'there is less chill in the peace with the world which knowledge supplies'<sup>7</sup> was not sufficient to restrain some of his disciples from depending on knowledge and philosophical comprehension not as a means of understanding God's will in the world but as a tool for attacking those forms of ethical life which did not conform to the ideal of rational humanism. This transposition made man the conscious instigator of the historical process rather than its interpreter.

Yet if Hegel's philosophy could be reduced to atheistic radicalism, it provided an equally strong foundation for an interpretation that saw creation as theogony and man as no more than the expression of divine existence. Hegel's understanding of the relationship of human individuality to the spirit in the *Gemeinde*, to the state and to history depends on the contrast between 'natural particularity' and an authentic subjectivity that willingly appropriates the rational and universal content of the immanent divine. The term 'natural particularity' seems to imply an irreducibly unique individuality, with its own content, which refuses to submit itself to the unifying process of divine self-expression. The weaknesses of this 'natural particularity' become most clear for Hegel in the appeal to individual conscience: whereas 'conscience as the unity of subjective knowing with what is absolute is a sanctuary which it would be sacrilege to violate', conscience simply 'as the subjective reflection of self-consciousness into itself' has no special rights.<sup>8</sup> The good depends on subjectivity for its realization, but the rights of subjectivity derive from its coincidence with what is universally true rather than from any characteristics unique to human individuality. Hegel's interpretation emphasizes the need for the moral agent to act according to universal moral laws. The appeal to subjective conscience as self-sufficient and self-justifying was invalid for Hegel precisely because it could justify anarchic and destructive behaviour in all aspects of life.

If Hegel's interpretation of conscience guarded against moral anarchism, it failed to provide a philosophical basis for the unique characteristics of the moral personality. Subjectivity, for Hegel, is finally nothing more than assent to a content that is presented to the individual by the *Weltgeist* without the individual's free participation. If history is the realization of God's life and God's life is a necessary process, then all of history, including the acts of each individual, is a necessary process. The lives of individuals are not the unique pathways of free creatures but material employed for the self-expression of the absolute. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* stresses both the sacred character of the

individual soul, its safety from all the ravages of the historical process, and the sovereign rights of the world-spirit, which must of necessity crush holy interests and innocent individuals. His interpretation attempts to guarantee individuals' unity with God through their membership of the religious community and at the same time identify God with a historical process which obeys no moral laws.

Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel focussed on Hegel's concern for the importance of history and his emphasis on the need for the individual to find God in the products of history, especially in the state. These falsehoods depended, for Kierkegaard, on the mistake of making the historical commensurate with the eternal, rather than concentrating on the instantaneous union of temporal and eternal in the incarnation. For Kierkegaard a philosophy of history which saw it not only as God's will but also as God's becoming must necessarily destroy the relationship of God to the individual. Either God related uniquely to each individual in each historical age or else the individual must be reduced to mere 'material' of the historical process. If history could in any sense be said to be progressing, then individuals must eventually be forced to worship the institutions of progress rather than God, since, as Hegel had said, these institutions are ultimately capable of realizing in themselves the content of what was formerly called 'holy'. Individuals derived their value and dignity from their religious relationship to God. This relationship began from an equal basis for all since all historical ages were equally remote from God's grace. For Kierkegaard God could not be both the divine object of religious worship, who related to the individual in his uniqueness through the gift of grace, and at the same time the spirit of history, the justification for secular institutions that claimed to possess a universal rationality and which required the individual's allegiance.

Kierkegaard's understanding of ethics depended on precisely those characteristics which Hegel had sought to subordinate. In *Fear and Trembling* it is Abraham's opaque and incommunicable moral subjectivity which is analysed. The rights of conscience as such, irrespective of its conformity with universal law, are seen as essential to the understanding of individuality. For Kierkegaard the dangers of moral anarchism were clearly less fearful than what he considered the essentially atheistic sacrifice of individuality to laws and institutions that claimed to be identified with God's will through the historical process. If, for Kierkegaard, history was irrelevant to God's life, then secularity was without significance. Hegel's emphasis on the convergence of the religious and secular spheres, on the relationship of the religious community to the ethical life of the state, was rejected by Kierkegaard because the grace of the incarnation could not be said to permeate the historical world. Yet Kierkegaard's constant attack on the notion of history as the

vessel of grace implied a radically impoverished doctrine of the Church as well as an eccentric doctrine of the relation between faith and reason. For Kierkegaard, since the Church could not claim to communicate the truth of the incarnation in any sense other than preserving the bare facts of the Gospel and presenting these with a warning concerning their repellent absurdity, it was virtually impossible to arrive at any developed notion of religious community. Kierkegaard's insistence on the incommensurability of the eternal and the historical and on the weakening of Christian truth through any attempt to mediate it through the culture of a community necessarily forced the individual to accept the truths of faith as a rejection both of reason and of community.

Hegel's doctrine of the spirit, by contrast, was able to develop a satisfying concept of the Church as a community of belief which preserved its continuity with the historical Jesus through the indwelling life of the spirit, which itself had been introduced into the world as the universalization in space and time of the historical events of the incarnation. Rather than being presented with a skeletal Gospel calculated to give offense to reason, Hegel's believer was invited to share in a spiritual life that was still, so to speak, living the life of the apostolic community. Whereas for Kierkegaard the problem of faith and its justification was of paramount importance, for Hegel the concept of the *Gemeinde* put the crisis of individual faith in the context of shared worship. In the *Gemeinde* the life of the spirit could be lived and felt as self-justifying, giving the individual himself a new and infinite foundation of existence. Since the spirit was necessarily the universalization of the incarnation, the inspiration of the concrete Kingdom of God, its influence must lead the individual to overcome the barrier between the *Gemeinde* and the world, setting up institutions which were free of the particular emotional characteristics of religion but which shared its essence. The spirit of history was the bond uniting each individual with God in the incarnation and with others in community.

Hegel's doctrine of the spirit proposes that all of history is the immediate will of God, and that its significance can become wholly clear to man after the event. For Hegel there is therefore no insoluble problem of evil, since periods of alienation and barbarity in world history can be understood as the necessary phases of self-externalization of the divine process. Evil is not for Hegel the act of man as a free moral agent which necessarily cuts him off from God and can only be overcome by the free gift of grace, but is rather a necessary stage in man's growth to full self-consciousness and at the same time part of God's own life. The myth of the garden of Eden is the myth of man's maturation. The historical theory which understood the post-Revolutionary *Rechtsstaat* as the substantial culmination of history also implied that evil had been substantially overcome. The development of a speculative philosophy

that was fully commensurate with the truth of revelation and of a state that could claim to be based both on the infinite strength of subjectivity and on the universal will of the *Weltgeist* is the resolution of the process of divine life and consequently the substantial conquest of evil. For Hegel, the political consequence of this overcoming of evil was the belief that revolution must be a thing of the past: there was no longer any justification for a fight to the death between historical reality and the projects of the free spirit. In religious terms, this conquest of evil meant that the retreat from worldly reality characteristic of the religious life of the past was no longer justified. Religion must accept that God's life was expressed in the human community of the state, and recognize that its own laws did not transcend those of secular ethics. In both religion and politics, the appeal to a transcendent ideal in the face of evil actuality no longer had any foundation.

While Kierkegaard's understanding of the insignificance of history preserved the inviolability of the relationship between God and the individual, it necessarily denied the presence of the spirit in the world consequent upon the incarnation. His doctrine of the 'instant' ignored the significance of the epochal revelation of God within the social and political history of Israel as well as the authentically ethical content of secular institutions. Hegel's philosophy of history, by contrast, abolished both the uniqueness of religion itself, by asserting the ultimate transparency of the divine nature to human reason, as well as replacing ethics with the philosophical comprehension of reality. Neither of these thinkers developed an understanding of the relationship of God and man, the individual and history, which could retain the ethical dignity of secular institutions of human community while preserving the individual's moral independence from history, his irreducibly unique character as both God's creature and God's image. Neither Hegel nor Kierkegaard expressed the full range and significance of the Biblical theme of the Kingdom of God, whose transformation of the conditions of human existence is fulfilled only in the *eschaton*, yet which invites human response within secular history itself.

A Christian understanding of history which would learn from Hegel can accept his derivation of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* from the Biblical understanding of man, while at the same time denying that the historical emergence of this secular affirmation of the infinite foundations of human nature was part of a necessary process or an aspect of God's own becoming. It would accept his insight that secular history evolves under the influence of sacred history, but attempt to distinguish the spiritual fate of individuals from that of the secular age they live in more effectively than he was able to do. Hegel's belief that history was the revelation of God's own life must be corrected by the knowledge that a partial synthesis of Christianity and

secular civilization is contingent upon the moral choices of individuals and thus constantly prone to dissolution. No equilibrium in human history is ever guaranteed, because it is not God's unchanging and infinite life which is at stake in it, but rather the inconstant response of man to the grace of the incarnation which is offered to him in history by the spirit.

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## NOTES

**Chapter 1 — Religion and politics in the philosophy of Hegel**

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1. S. Avineri, in his *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge, 1972) chapter 3, discusses Hegel's analysis of the weaknesses that the Peace of Westphalia institutionalized in the life of the Holy Roman Empire. Hegel's judgement of the Peace remained unaltered in his mature writings, cf. pp. 518–19 of the *Philosophie der Geschichte*, volume 12 of G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1969), ed. E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel. All references to Hegel's works, unless otherwise stated, are to this edition.
2. Hegel, *Theorie Werkausgabe, Frühe Schriften*, p. 33.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.
9. R. Plant, in his *Hegel* (London, 1973), p. 31, notes how Hegel's sensitivity to Germany's lack of a 'mythology' that could foster cultural community was maintained in his mature thought as a concern for the relationship between language and action. 'It became one of his major preoccupations that conventional discourse has become abstract and one-dimensional to the extent that life has begun to outrun thought. The task of philosophy . . . was to develop a conceptual framework which would be capable of encapsulating the life of society, a framework which once shared would enable men to live at home in the world with one another.'
10. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T.M. Knox (Chicago, 1948), p. 152.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 127–129.
14. *Frühe Schriften*, pp. 149 and 155.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 235–6.
18. Hegel's project of a new mythology that could unite reason and fantasy had much in common with the young Friedrich Schlegel's ideas in his *Rede über die Mythologie* (1800), without, of course, there being any direct influence. For Schlegel also the task of mythology was to make possible a new richness of communication, but his emphasis was on its benefits to literature rather than to community. Beyond that, the study of ancient Oriental mythology could, for Schlegel, be the foundation of a new universal religion that could express the romantic desire for religious renewal. (*Rede über die Mythologie in Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, vol 2, edited by E. Behler.)

19. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
20. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 187.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
26. H.S. Harris, in his *Hegel's Development* (Oxford, 1972), p. 157, notes that the young Hegel 'was not concerned with the nature of God, but with the nature of man. Religion was for him, as for Lessing, the great instrument of Providence by which human nature is rightly developed and truly revealed. Thus Haering's perfectly correct insistence that he was a *Volkserzieher* does not really conflict with Lukacs' portrait of him as a kind of proto-Marx. It is in and through political action that man realizes and displays the power of *Vernunft* which it is the providential function of religion to develop.'
27. *Early Theological Writings*, p. 159.
28. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp.310–11.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
30. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 351.
31. Hegel, *Philosophie der Religion I*, p. 18.
32. *Philosophie des Geistes*, p. 389.
33. *Philosophie der Religion I*, pp.139–40.
34. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 566.
35. *Philosophie der Religion I*, p. 179.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
40. *Philosophie des Geistes*, p. 373.
41. *Philosophie der Religion I*, p. 198.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
43. *Philosophie des Geistes*, p. 374.
44. *Philosophie der Religion I*, p. 202.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
50. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 193.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 270. In the words of a contemporary theologian: 'If God is not accessible by his own action, accessible *in* human actions and thoughts, human deeds and words, then Christian faith, hope and obedience are merely the reaching out from slavery to unattainable freedom. Such reaching out may have its own tragic nobility. It may even, so long as it can be sustained, exercise a transformative influence in human affairs: it might well, in certain circumstances, function as stimulant and critique, rather than as narcotic. But, unless God is accessible by his own action, Christian faith expresses only man's hope, and theology is

rendered incapable of speaking of God.' N. Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach*, London, 1979, p. 17.

57. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 273.
  58. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
  59. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
  60. *Enzyklopädie I: Wissenschaft der Logik*, paras. 163–5.
  61. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 552.
  62. *Ibid.*, p. 553.
  63. *Ibid.*, p. 549.
  64. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 280.
  65. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
  66. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
  67. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 572.
  68. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 293.
  - 68a. *Ibid.*, p. 297.
  69. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 540.
  70. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
  71. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
  72. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
  73. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 452.
  74. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 49.
- For J. Habermas, in his *Theory and Practice* (Heinemann, London, 1974), this theory of historical action explains Hegel's complex attitudes to the French Revolution. Hegel 'elevates the revolution to the main principle of his philosophy for the sake of a philosophy which overcomes the revolution as such'. (p. 136) This is because 'he has to legitimize the revolutionizing of reality without legitimizing the revolutionaries themselves. That is why he undertakes the magnificent attempt to understand the actualization of abstract Right as an objective process.' (p. 126) By ascribing infinite will and knowledge to the *Weltgeist*, Hegel is able to abolish the justification for the subjective revolutionary consciousness while at the same time valuing the revolution's achievements. Because the *Weltgeist* has full self-knowledge only 'after it has objectified itself in the course of history . . . it must not be recognizable as revolutionary consciousness'. (pp. 138–9) Hegel's attempt to bring philosophical theory into the realm of historical praxis necessarily clashes, for Habermas, with his retention of the 'dialectic as ontology' in the form of the world spirit, which abolishes the link between human consciousness and historical praxis. The mature Hegel's conception of revolution as being justifiable only after the event, never as a conscious, future-oriented project, gave as little significance to finite will, in Habermas' view, as the Christian eschatology of the second coming which the young Hegel had criticized as crippling men's commitment to historical and communal goals.
75. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 53.
  76. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
  77. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 385.
  78. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
  79. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
  80. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 552, p. 356.
  81. *Rechtsphilosophie*, para. 270, p. 418.
  82. *Ibid.*, p. 419.
  83. *Ibid.*, p. 418.
  84. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 552, p. 357.
  85. *Rechtsphilosophie*, para. 270, p. 419.



86. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 552, p. 357.
87. *Rechtsphilosophie*, para. 270, Addition, p. 430.
88. *Ibid.*, para. 270, p. 420.
89. *Philosophy of Right*, translated and edited by T.M. Knox, Oxford, 1967, p. 84.
90. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 164.
91. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 169.
92. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 474.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 497.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 502–3.
95. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 392.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 432.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
99. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 301.
100. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 556.
101. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 302.
102. *Ibid.*, pp. 302–3.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
107. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 401.
108. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 325.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 330.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
113. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 513.
114. *Ibid.*, para. 514.
115. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 55.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
117. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 67.
118. *Philosophy of Right* (Knox), p. 106.
119. *Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 399, para. 258.
120. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 570.
121. *Rechtsphilosophie*, para. 260, Addition.
122. *Rechtsphilosophie*, para. 258, Addition.
123. *Philosophy of Right*, (Knox), p. 109. (Para. 152).
124. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 308.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
126. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 585.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 585. For K. Barth, in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (SCM, 1972), Hegel's description of the necessary process of divine life, its self-externalization and recapture, could apply equally well to man and especially to human knowledge: 'The self-movement of truth would have to be detached from the self-movement of man – and here it is equated with it with the utmost explicitness and rigour of logic – to be justly regarded as the self-movement of God.' (p. 419) Hegel's analysis makes God a prisoner of his own nature, so that revelation is no longer a free act, but a necessity which ultimately depends on man: 'The finite consciousness, which partakes of revelation, thus shows itself as a motive power in the concept, in the process of God himself . . . I am necessary to God. That is the basis of Hegel's confidence in God'. (p. 420)

128. *Philosophie des Geistes*, p. 358. For Hegel, the corruption of religion before the emergence of secular thought and freedom is not only an historical fact but also an inevitability: 'Yet even though religion, in its own development, also develops the differentiation contained in the idea, so can – no must – its existence in its first immediate form be one-sided, and its life be corrupted to sensuous externality and further to the repression of the freedom of the spirit and the dislocation of political life'. (*Ibid.*, p. 365.)
129. E. Fackenheim, in his *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington and London, 1967), notes that Hegel attempts to treat religion in two stages, its self-understanding as *Vorstellung* and the speculative interpretation of it by philosophy, yet the first stage is never extensively dealt with (p. 118). Further he discerns a contradiction in Hegel's understanding of the relationship of religion to philosophy: 'Either the representational form of religion is essential to its content and this is why philosophy requires religion (and the absolute philosophy the Christian religion) as necessary pre-supposition. But then how can philosophy transcend or transfigure the representational form without loss of the religious content? Or else philosophy does achieve its unprecedented feat: but then was not the representational form all along unessential to the religious content? And does not then philosophy presuppose religion, if at all, only *per accidens*?' (p. 162)
130. In *Gottesgedanke und menschliche Freiheit* (Göttingen, 1972); p. 110.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
132. C. Taylor, *Hegel*, (Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 348.
133. W. Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, pp. 346–348, discusses the reasonableness of faith from this perspective.
134. A discussion of the rationality of religious belief in these terms is presented in B. Mitchell's *The Justification of Religious Belief* (Macmillan, 1973)
135. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie, (Princeton, 1968), p. 182.
136. *Philosophie der Religion II*, p. 343. For C. Taylor, in his *Hegel*, Hegel's concern was to 'situate subjectivity', to give it a context, an order within which it could exercise its freedom, and it is his profound grasp of this problem which gives his thought continuing significance: 'If the philosophical attempt to situate freedom is the attempt to gain a conception of man in which free action is the response to what we are – or to a call which comes to us, from nature alone or a God who is also beyond nature (the debate will never cease) – then it will always recur behind Hegel's conclusions to his strenuous and penetrating reflections on embodied spirit'. (p. 571) For Taylor, Hegel's attempt to develop an ontology which could give the subject a fully explicit rational justification for his choice of a 'situation' reflected his conviction that the presuppositions for our values and actions, the constitution of our world of meaning, could be fully conceptualized, giving 'primacy in the end to the descriptive dimension'. (p. 569) Taylor's emphasis on a contrasting understanding of subjectivity's 'situation' as a *Lebenswelt* whose meaning and normative character cannot be exhaustively expressed in conceptual terms corresponds closely with the understanding of faith argued for in this chapter.
137. *Philosophie der Religion II*, pp. 343–4.
138. *Early Theological Writings*, translated T.M. Knox, p. 301.
139. *Philosophie des Geistes*, p. 364.
140. For J.N. Shklar, in *Freedom and Independence* (Cambridge, 1976), 'what matters is the contribution that the passions make to social life, and to Hegel it seemed evident that it was greater than that of reflective reason. It was thus speci-

fically against Socrates and Kant that he argued when he claimed that a "passion, as for example, love, ambition, is the universal itself, as it is self-realizing not in perception, but in activity . . . For the individual the universal is his own interest". (*Geschichte der Philosophie I*, 413) This is Hegel at his most radical. Not just subjectivity, rational or irrational, and not only the primacy of moral reason are at stake. The very structure of the individual psyche is here forced off the centre of the stage to be replaced by social rationality. It is the social function of passion and action that raises them above individual reason. Whatever the place of reflective reason may be in the individual soul, it does not inspire action. Moreover its divisiveness and its isolating force, as much as its passivity, render private reason socially irrational'. (p. 201)

141. *Philosophy of Right*, trans. Knox, pp. 166–167.

142. *Philosophy of Religion II*, p. 219.

143. *Philosophy of Right*, Knox, p. 108 (para. 150, Addition) For J. Ritter, in his 'Moralität und Sittlichkeit, zu Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit der kantischen Ethik' in *Metaphysik und Politik* (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1969), Hegel's understanding of the relationship between morality and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) revived Aristotle's notion of practical philosophy and restored the unity of ethics and politics. For Ritter, Hegel's emphasis on the development of concrete ethical institutions as a context for subjectivity gives politics its due importance in relation to ethics. Without the existence of free political institutions, subjective moral intention remains fruitless or is condemned to sacrifice itself in a vain clash with an immoral public order. 'The freedom of the self, of intention and of conscience and the ethical life of free persons have permanence and reality only when institutions are proportionate to them. Where they cease to have freedom as their substance and reach a form in which it is abandoned, then the ethical reality of the freedom of the self is also dissolved and what is willed and known internally as right and good can no longer be realized in life and action'. (p. 308)

144. *Philosophy of Right*, Knox, p. 204.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

146. *Ibid.*, pp. 196–7.

147. *Philosophie des Geistes*, para. 542. For K.H. Ilting, in his 'The Structure of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' in *Hegel's Political Philosophy*, edited by Z.A. Pelczynski (Cambridge, 1971), Hegel's interpretation of the state remained strongly influenced by the idea of the *polis*: 'by his antique interpretation of the modern state, Hegel was induced to assume that peoples or nations are, as it were, historical personalities to which the individual man, in his historical existence, belonged unconditionally'. (p. 102) For Ilting, Hegel's emphasis on the social character of modern labour could have provided a means of correcting the liberal conception of the state in the light of his early republican ideals, but Hegel's treatment of the problem of sovereignty as linked with the monarch rather than with the social and democratic state meant that this possibility remained unfulfilled. Hegel's failure, in Ilting's view, was 'due to his refusal to recognize the contradiction between the rational that was already actual and the irrational which did still exist'. (p. 109)

148. *Philosophy of Right*, para. 329.

149. *Ibid.*, para. 283.

150. *Ibid.*, para. 280, Addition.

151. *Ibid.*, para. 300, Addition.

152. *Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 399 (para. 258).

153. *Philosophy of Right*, Knox, para. 258, pp. 156–7.

154. Berlin, 1970.

- 155. p.441.
- 156 *Ibid.*, p. 447.
- 157. *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Nisbet, 1935.

## Chapter 2 — Bauer: Atheistic humanism and the critique of religious alienation

pages 69–107

1. D. Hertz-Eichenrode, 'Der Junghegelianer Bruno Bauer im Vormärz', D. Phil. thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 1959, pp. 10–19.
2. *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* (2nd edition, Leipzig, 1846), pp. vi–vii.
3. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
4. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
5. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.
6. *Ibid.*, I, p. 408.
7. *Ibid.*, I, p. 244.
8. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, London, 1954, p. 138, Z. Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, The Hague, 1977, p. 50.
9. *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte*, III, p. 14.
10. *Ibid.*, III, p. 15.
11. *Ibid.*, III, 252.
12. *Ibid.*, III, p. 308.
13. *Ibid.*, III, p. 309.
14. *Ibid.*, III, p. 310.
15. *Ibid.*, III, p. 312.
16. Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
17. *Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen*, 1841, in Löwith, K. *Hegelsche Linke*, Stuttgart, 1962, p. 166.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 170, quoted from the Preface to Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
24. Bauer's interpretation of Hegel was strikingly similar to that of the most celebrated exponent of a 'left-wing' interpretation of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*: 'by seeing in the Wise Man the *human ideal* in general, the Philosopher attributes to himself as Philosopher a human value without equal (p. 88) . . . In short the *Phenomenology* only shows that the ideal of the Wise Man, as it is defined therein, is the necessary ideal of philosophy, and of every philosophy — that is, of every man who puts the supreme value on Self-consciousness, which is precisely a consciousness of self and not of something else'. (p. 92) Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, New York, 1969.
25. *Posaune*, p. 170.
26. E. Barnikol, in his *Bruno Bauer, Studien und Materialien* (Assen, 1972), considered this review to be the work of Bauer himself. (p. 547)
27. *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, 1841, p. 594.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 594.
29. *Der christliche Staat und unsere Zeit*, *Hallische Jahrbücher*, 1841, p. 537.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 537.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 541.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 542.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 550.
34. *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit* (Zürich und Winterthur, 1842), p. 39.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
37. Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
38. For E. Barnikol, in his essay 'Bruno Bauers Kampf gegen Religion und Christentum und die Spaltung der vormärzlichen preussischen Opposition' (in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, Band XLVI, Neue Folge LX, 1927) Bauer's *Das entdeckte Christentum* was to 'decide the question of religion once and for all' and to abolish the religious foundations of the establishment. 'Bruno Bauer's conflict with religion was in the service of his Prussian politics, which was intended to dominate the Prussian state, to free it and to found, through "pure criticism", a state both internally and externally truly independent of religion and the Church. In this sense, which cannot be emphasized enough, his struggle against religion was to him a service to the state'. (p. 21) Barnikol notes further, however, that Bauer's extreme atheism, combined with his unpolitical and illiberal judgments of the situation, caused a harmful split in the liberal opposition to the regime: Bauer rejected co-operation with the liberals since his own ideal was an atheistic rather than a politically liberal state. His articles destroyed the politically liberal potential of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. This reinforced by his refusal to condemn the Berlin *Freien*, led to Marx's break with him. Cf. Rosen, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–5.
39. *Die Judenfrage*, in *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, 1842, p. 1108.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 1119.
41. *Kritik der Synoptiker*, I, p. 25.
42. *Über die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden*, in H.M. Sass, ed., *Feldzüge der reinen Kritik* (Frankfurt, 1968), p. 186.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
45. *Kritik der Synoptiker*, III, p. 99.
46. *Das entdeckte Christentum*, Zürich, 1843, re-issued by E. Barnikol in *Das entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz*, Jena, 1927, p. 141.
47. *Die gute Sache der Freiheit*, pp. 9–10.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8.
49. *Das entdeckte Christentum*, p. 141.
50. *Theologische Schaamlosigkeiten*, *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, 1841, p. 465.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
52. *Leiden und Freuden des theologischen Bewusstseins*, in *Anekdoten*, ed. A. Ruge, Zürich und Winterthur, 1843, p. 96.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
54. *Theologische Schaamlosigkeiten*, p. 466.
55. *Leiden und Freuden*, p. 112.
56. *Das entdeckte Christentum*, Zürich, 1843, re-issued by E. Barnikol in *Das entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz*, Jena, 1927, p. 138.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
58. *Kritik der Synoptiker*, II, p. 160.
59. *Die gute Sache der Freiheit*, p. 71.
60. *Das entdeckte Christentum*, p. 155.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
67. *Die gute Sache der Freiheit*, p. 203.
68. Hertz-Eichenrode, 'Der Junghegelianer Bruno Bauer im Vormärz', *op. cit.*, p. 89.
69. *Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik?* first published in Bauer's *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, June 1844, re-printed in *Feldzüge der reinen Kritik*, ed. H.M. Sass, Frankfurt, 1968, p. 202 (Sass ed.)
70. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
74. *Bekenntnisse einer schwachen Seele*, *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, 1842, p. 596.
75. *Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik?*, p. 212.
76. *Review of Hinrichs politische Vorlesungen*, in Sass, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–8.
77. *Bekenntnisse einer schwachen Seele*, pp. 593–4.
78. *Die Gattung und die Masse*, in Sass, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
84. *Ludwig Feuerbach*, in *Beiträge zum Feldzüge der reinen Kritik*, Berlin, 1846, p. 4.
85. For N. Lobkowicz, in his *Theory and Practice* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 257, 'Feuerbach . . . instead of trying to transcend man's finite condition simply declares man's finite condition infinite. The task of philosophy, then, consists in "putting the infinite into the finite", that is, in rediscovering the original infinity of natural finite man . . . Hegel conceived the self-realization of man as a transcendence of the limited and natural biological level; Feuerbach, on the contrary, condemned all such transcendence as "alienation". In this sense he is a precursor of all "philosophies of life" from Nietzsche to Klages'. For M. Wartofsky, by contrast, in his *Feuerbach* (Cambridge, 1977), Feuerbach envisages man's transformation through the dialectical process of image formation: 'The overcoming of sheer identity with the image is the work of critique. This critique raised to the level of self-recognition in the image is *self-criticism*. Self-transformation requires both self-objectification and the critique of this objectification. Dialectic is nothing less than this process of self-transformative praxis, therefore'. (p. 13).
86. *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 12.
87. *Das entdeckte Christentum*, p. 95.
88. For J.E. Toews, in *Hegelianism. The Path towards Dialectical Humanism 1805–1841* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), although Marx, Feuerbach and Bauer 'all accused each other of regressing to the abstract and undialectical positions of traditional metaphysical idealism or materialism, they all laid claim to the dialectical inheritance'. Bauer, as well as Marx and Feuerbach, made his analysis of the human condition concrete by 'shifting the locus of human emancipation from the political to the social dimension', although he rejected socialist and communist theory. 'The development of Bauer's critical theory after 1843 was also grounded in a critical reduction of the illusion of human essence to the

concrete relationships of human existence'. While rejecting the social projects of the Feuerbachians, 'Bauer also insisted that such negative dialectics was a positive, communal activity.' (p. 365) For the present author, however, Bauer's shift from political concern was less to the 'social dimension' than to a revolution of consciousness, a fundamental re-orientation away from all objective substance, whether religious or social, a characteristic of Bauer's thought which is well-expressed by H. Stuke: 'Bauer's critique of established reality was ultimately not against particular historical relationships, institutions, ethics and rights, or forms and concretions of the spirit which no longer corresponded to its "higher concept", but rather against the (in the Hegelian sense) continuing substance of world-history itself'. (*Philosophie der Tat*, Stuttgart, 1963, p. 186.)

89. *Russland und das Germanentum*, Charlottenburg, 1853, p. 121.

90. *Kritik der Synoptiker*, III, p. 310.

### Chapter 3 — Political utopia and the philosophy of action

pages 109–168

1. A. Ruge, *Sämtliche Werke*, Mannheim, 1847, volume 4, p. 7.
2. W. Neher, *Arnold Ruge als Politiker und politischer Schriftsteller*, Heidelberg, 1933, p. 51.
3. *Werke*, IV, p. 24.
4. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 25.
5. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 273.
6. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 280–1.
7. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 279.
8. As a Hegelian, Ruge initially felt the need to identify with a historical tradition in order to avoid assuming a 'party' consciousness over against a reality that was assumed to be the expression of historical reason. The problem was solved when the Prussian state began to suppress free thought, notably in its dismissal of Bauer from his teaching post at the University of Bonn. For Ruge, this meant that the state itself had become partisan, opposing the progress of critical reason which had its leading exponents in the Young Hegelians themselves. This implied in turn the right of the representatives of reason to make critical judgements of reality. cf. W. Neher, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–5, 80.
9. *Werke*, IV, p. 404.
10. A modern commentator on Hegel has assumed a stance very similar to Ruge in the criticism of the idea of absolute knowledge: 'Philosophical concepts now came to reflect the actual movement of reality, but since they themselves were patterned on its social content, they stopped where the content stopped, that is, in the state that governed civil society, while the ideas and values that pointed beyond this social system were stowed away in the realm of the absolute mind, in the system of dialectical philosophy'. H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, (New York, 1955), p. 257.
11. *Werke*, IV, p. 43.
12. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 288.
13. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 288.
14. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 291.
15. *Werke*, X, p. 420.
16. *Werke*, VI, p. 60.
17. *Werke*, X, p. 419.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 423.
19. IV, p. 228.

20. IV, p. 222.
21. IV, p. 239.
22. *Werke*, IX, p. 151.
23. *Werke*, IV, p. 127.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
25. *Werke*, I, p. 301.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
27. VI, p. 62.
28. *Werke*, IV, p. 458–9.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 452.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
36. *Werke*, VI, p. 134.
37. IX, p. 159.
38. X, p. 428.
39. VI, p. 122.
40. IX, p. 377.
41. IX, p. 395. See p. 149 of text. (Intended to refer to page of text.)
42. IX, p. 413.
43. IX, p. 414.
44. cf. H. Rosenberg, 'Arnold Ruge und die Hallischen Jahrbücher', in his *Politische Denkströmungen im deutschen Vormärz* (Göttingen, 1972), p. 112, and H. Strauss, 'Zur sozial- und ideengeschichtlichen Einordnung Arnold Ruges', in *Schweizer Beiträge zur Allgemeinen Geschichte*, Band 12, 1954, p. 165.
45. Neher, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
46. For E. Kehr, in his 'Zur Genesis der preussischen Bürokratie und des Rechtsstaates: Ein Beitrag zum Diktaturproblem', in H.U. Wehler, ed., *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte* (Köln-Berlin, 1966), p. 46, 'all political claims of the German bourgeoisie in the 19th century are economic claims, which required political guarantees only for the protection of economic interests and not because of "politics" itself.' Such an interpretation, together with his association of political freedom with atheism, may explain the difficulty Ruge had in gaining support for a democratic political philosophy which went beyond the limits of economic liberalism.
47. *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. H. Lademacher (Köln, 1962), p. 372.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
49. *Philosophische und Sozialistische Schriften: eine Auswahl*, ed. A. Cornu and W. Mönke (Berlin, 1961), p. 8.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
55. A. von Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, (Berlin, 1838), pp. 9–15.
56. Lademacher, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
57. Cornu and Mönke, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
58. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena*, p. 19.
59. Cornu and Mönke, p. 96.



60. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
61. Lademacher, p. 99.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
63. Cornu and Mönke, p. 127.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
70. E. Silberner, *Moses Hess: Geschichte seines Lebens*, Leiden, 1966, ch. 4, *passim*.  
D. McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, London, 1969, p. 16.
71. Silberner, p. 96.
72. Lademacher, p. 132.
73. Cornu and Mönke, p. 218.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
75. Lademacher, p. 140.
76. Cornu and Mönke, p. 225.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
80. In general, Hess's judgements on the history of philosophy take the form of a freely – sometimes arbitrarily – personal interpretation of the role a given thinker played in the dialectic of ideas that Hess sees as culminating in the *Philosophie der Tat*, the advocacy of ethical action as the creator of the future. A central doctrine is seized upon and transformed into the symbol of a particular thinker's historical role. Hegel becomes the cipher for the philosophical understanding of history that limited itself to meditation on the past, Schelling the understanding of nature, and Spinoza the philosophical Messiah of the modern epoch.
81. Cornu and Mönke, p. 199.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
83. H. Lademacher, *Moses Hess in seiner Zeit*, Bonn, 1977, p. 53.
84. Lademacher, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 156.
85. Cornu and Mönke, p. 205.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
91. Lademacher, p. 165.
92. Cornu and Mönke, p. 339.
93. Lademacher, p. 163.
94. K. Mielcke, in his *Deutscher Frühsozialismus: Gesellschaft und Geschichte in den Schriften von Weitling und Hess*, (*Forschungen zur Geschichts- und Gesellschaftslehre*, Heft 4, 1931), notes that Hess's later acceptance of historical materialism was not completely without precedent in his early thought. In Mielcke's judgement, Hess had hoped to develop a justification for socialism from the philosophy of history, but finally felt compelled to make an ethical statement of humanity's need. (p. 133) H. Stuke, in his *Philosophie der Tat*, *op. cit.*, also comments on the inconsistency in Hess's use of both ethical and historical arguments for socialism. (p. 216)
95. Lademacher, p. 167.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
97. Cornu and Mönke, p. 285.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 351.
99. Lademacher, p. 165.
100. Cornu and Mönke, p. 319.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 322.
102. Lademacher, p. 175.
103. Cornu and Mönke, p. 315.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
108. Lademacher, p. 167.
109. This priority referred particularly to his attack on Kühlmann and Becker in his piece *Umtriebe der kommunistischen Propheten*, Cornu und Mönke, pp. 376–77.
110. Cornu and Mönke, p. 300.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
112. Lademacher, p. 168.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
114. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena*, pp. 147–8. For A. Liebich, in his *Between Ideology and Utopia; The Politics and Philosophy of A. Cieszkowski* (Dordrecht, 1979) ‘in evoking Fourier’s system as one “which has made a great step in developing organic truth within reality”, and simultaneously criticizing it as an unselfconscious production, Cieszkowski is conveying two ideas: first, that the construction of utopia is a valid task in the cognition of the future; second, that utopia has been inadequately understood as a relation between the ideal and the real. The implications of the paradoxes which he deduces from Fourier’s position are unmistakable: if utopia as a category of analysis is developed speculatively and consciously it will result not in vain utopianism but in knowledge of the future. The true utopia can “never be ideal enough” for it is teleological. In this way, the concept of utopia – like myth in Strauss’s work – is taken out of the realm of illusion or deception and granted legitimacy’. (p. 49) Such an understanding of the role of utopia is true also of Hess: for both Hess and Cieszkowski the elaboration of social utopia was accompanied by an awareness of detailed tasks and concrete reforms. For J. Gebhardt, in his *Politik und Eschatologie* (München, 1963), ‘the transformation of the speculative revolt against our own creaturehood into an objective revolutionizing of the order of being through revolutionary action in historico-political reality received through Cieszkowski a symbolisation which remains popular to this day’. (p. 145) Yet an interpretation of the utopianism of Hess and Cieszkowski as a gnostic ‘leap out of being’ (p. 144) does not do justice to a form of utopianism which had no desire to impose itself upon the world and which acted as a visionary encouragement to concrete and humane social action. ‘If utopia is a regulative idea of the optimum and not an assurance that we have mastered the skill to produce the optimum, then utopia is a necessary part of our thinking’, L. Kolakowski, ‘Need of Utopia, Fear of Utopia’, in *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Bialer and Sluzer, vol. 2: *Radical Visions of the Future*, 1977, p. 11.
115. Cornu and Mönke, p. 292.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 413.
117. Ruge drew his attention to the similarities between his own work and Stirner’s: ‘You seem not to have noticed that he wants fundamentally the same thing as

you, except that he comes from the other side. While you proceed from the whole, he comes as an individual, and demands that everyone should do the same. And what a divine chemistry! He has succeeded in dissolving all concepts and substances, he, the Creator. Yet you won't give this excellent man any credit . . . Even that is progress, that he writes like a human for humans and not, like the rest of our philosophers, and even you yourself, for gods and wandering scholastics'. Ruge to Hess, in *Moses Hess: Briefwechsel*, ed. E. Silberner (The Hague), 1959), p. 110.

118. E. Silberner, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–210, considers that Hess's stress on the necessarily immature character of socialist thought as the result of a sick social organism must be the result of the influence of Marx and Engels. Lademacher, *Moses Hess in seiner Zeit*, p. 68, emphasizes, however, that Hess's evolution from a generalized conception of the 'poor' towards a concentration on the proletariat as the only possible agent of change is not necessarily to be identified with the influence of Marx. D. McLellan, *op. cit.*, emphasizes the influence in particular of Hess's *Über das Geldwesen* on Marx, especially on the Paris Manuscripts of 1844 and *Zur Judenfrage*. (pp. 154–8)
119. Lademacher, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 194.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 398.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
131. *Philosophy of Right*, (Knox translation), p. 26.
132. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, p. 16.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
135. *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4.
136. E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 466–467, (Free Press, New York, 1965).

## Chapter 4 — The late Schelling: the philosophy of mythology and revelation

pages 169–210

1. In a letter written in 1832 Schelling had told a friend that he considered Hegel's philosophy 'in that which is peculiar to it, to be only an episode in the history of recent philosophy . . . and indeed a sad episode. Rather than continuing it, we must break with it completely and ignore it, in order to come back to the path of true progress.' (Quoted in H.-J. Sandkühler, *Freiheit und Wirklichkeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M., 1968, p. 222.)
2. *Schellings Werke*, edited by M. Schröter, München, 1927. (Second edition, 1959) Vol. 6, p. 755. All references to Schelling's works are to this edition.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 758.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 759.

5. *Schellings Werke*, 6th *Ergänzungsband*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 64–65.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
16. In his 1827 lectures on the history of philosophy, Schelling had criticized the pre-suppositions of Hegel's *Logic*. Hegel's description of the logical movement away from pure being, for Schelling, 'means nothing more than that the idea, which starts with pure being, feels the impossibility of remaining at this utterly abstract and empty level. The need to go beyond this has its origin purely in the fact that the idea is already used to a more concrete and fuller being, and thus cannot content itself with this thin fare of pure being. In the last instance it is only the circumstance that there is in fact a richer and fuller being, and the thinking mind is itself part of this. It is therefore not something about the empty concept itself, but rather a necessity inherent in philosophizing and its process of recollection, which does not allow it to remain at this level of empty abstraction.' (Volume 5, p. 201)
17. *6th Ergänzungsband*, p. 93.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
26. *Werke*, volume 6, p. 739.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 742.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 732.
29. *Werke*, volume 5, p. 747.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 748.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 765.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 768.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 769.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 771. E. Fackenheim, in his *Schelling's Conception of Positive Philosophy* (Review of *Metaphysics* VII, 1953 – 4), sums up the intentions of Schelling's late philosophy as a rejection of dialectical necessity: 'The absolute existent, as the Individual beyond all universality, must be outside all dialectic. The relationship can therefore be only one of free will. Free will in Schelling's fundamental existential category.' (p. 574) This absolute existent is the ground of all rationality, rather than *vice versa*. Fackenheim notes, however, a contradiction between Schelling's relativized understanding of reason and his employment of idealist categories to grasp the totality of being: 'The creation is by no means an empirical fact; it is an ideal construction. To validate this construction, the positive philosophy must presuppose precisely that absolute rationalism which the doctrine itself puts in question.' (p. 578) For Fackenheim, this contradiction is related to Schelling's failure to find any better solution to the problem of the relation between absolute

existence and reason than that advanced in the essay *Über die Quelle der ewigen Wahrheiten*.

35. *Schellings Werke*, volume 6, p. 62.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

38. *Schellings Werke*, 6th *Ergänzungsband*, pp. 382 – 410, *passim*.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

40. Volume 6, p. 347.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

42. For W. Schulz, in his *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart und Köln, 1955) Schelling's *Potenzen* 'are not only, or more precisely they are not at all primarily cosmic powers and forces, to be discussed as part of a metaphysical picture of the cosmic process, but they are also and before all else fundamental categories of pure reason'. (p. 16). Yet Schelling's doctrine seems finally to emphasize the demiurgic and ultimately trinitarian character of the *Potenzen* over their role as categories: 'Our principles of being would be completely misunderstood, if they were to be regarded as mere categories. One might wish to say that that which we have called the potency to be (*das Seynkönnende*) is nothing other than the universal category of the possible, applicable to everything, even the most particular and concrete thing. Or that which we have called 'pure being' is the Kantian category of 'reality', and the 'ought to be' is the universal rational category of necessity. But all this would be a complete misunderstanding. This potency to be is not the universal concept of possibility, applicable to the totality of the concrete, but, on the contrary, something highly particular: it is that unique and incomparable possibility, possibility *as such*, primal possibility, the ground of all becoming and thus of all created being.' (6th *Ergänzungsband*, pp. 245 – 5)

43. Volume 6, p. 369.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

45. 6th *Ergänzungsband*, p. 187.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

51. H. Fuhrmans, in his 'Der Gottesbegriff der Schellingschen positiven Philosophie' (in *Schelling Studien*, Festgabe für M. Schröter, München-Wien, 1965) stresses that 'the question concerning the freedom of God, his freedom in relation to the world, became the most urgent question of the late Schelling, the crowning of his long wished-for "system of freedom" against every "system of necessity"'. (pp. 33 – 34) Divine freedom creates the world from an act of will, not through emanation: 'God is already and in himself spirit since spirit is that which is self-sufficient and free of constraint. This was Schelling's radical renunciation of all those forms of thought which attempted to understand the world as the result of a need or necessity in God'. (p. 19) Fuhrmans grants, however, that the spirit of Schelling's philosophizing remains thoroughly permeated with idealism and with notions of theogony in particular: 'For Schelling, too, there is a "becoming" of God. First of all a pre-cosmic becoming, which grants him decisive self-knowledge – but also a cosmic becoming. But it is not the Father who "comes to himself" in the world, but rather the Son and the Holy Spirit which first become themselves in the cosmic process.' (p. 47)

52. 6th *Ergänzungsband*, pp. 264 – 5.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 3339 – 40.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
64. Volume 6, p. 403.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 401.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 420.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 428.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 440 – 52.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 463.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 620.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 713 – 4.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 720.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 724.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 725.
77. Volume 5, p. 718.
78. H.-J. Sandkühler, in *Freiheit und Wirklichkeit*, notes that Schelling made no liberal critique of the Karlsbad decrees of 1819. (p. 220) His objection to them was simply that they would unite all the forces of the Enlightenment in opposition. In the conflict between the king and the estates in Württemberg, Schelling took the part of the traditional estates, in opposition to Hegel. Schelling witnessed the 1848 revolution in Berlin with great anxiety, attributing it fundamentally to public boredom. For him, it showed the need 'to strive all the more to forget the present through philosophy'. (p. 225) He expected 'a new, even more frightful and more penetrating revolution . . . which will make the present so disheartening, that one will have to withdraw completely into an interior world'. (p. 228) The rough drafts of Schelling's lectures, according to Sandkühler, reveal that he knew of and criticized the early socialist movements.
79. *Werke*, volume 5, pp. 730 – 1.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 731.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 732.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 733.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 734. For Sandkühler in *Freiheit und Wirklichkeit*, 'For Schelling, the political is a real and necessary part of the system and yet theoretically only a negative by-product of the system . . . The political . . . is the perennial symptom of that fall of man from the absolute which is necessary for the revelation of the absolute'. (pp. 31 – 2) In Schelling's hands 'the philosophy of the deed became metaphysics once again, "the knowledge of the ideas or the eternal forms" . . . In the balance at the end of the philosophical revolution, in the denial of the liberation of man from nature for his own history, the insight into the fundamental connection between knowledge and liberation is written off as a loss'. (p. 104) For Schelling, 'the individual is near to reconciliation, but only in an immediate relationship to God and beyond the sphere of public life'. (p. 243) For

Sandkühler, Schelling's philosophy played a role similar to that attributed to Comte by H. Marcuse in his *Reason and Revolution* (New York, 1954): 'Positive' philosophy is thought which legitimizes the historically given and represses criticism – Schelling's emphasis on the metaphysical elucidation of the unchanging structure of being ignored the 'praxis-character of knowledge' and the radical consequences of a union of theory and praxis that Hegel and Young Hegelians had explored. The contrast between Schelling and the Young Hegelians is clear, but a distinction between Schelling and Hegel in terms of the 'praxis-character of knowledge' cannot be made so readily. Sandkühler's interpretation attributes to Hegel's thought a radicalism that the Young Hegelians themselves could not find in its explicit formulations.

84. *Werke*, volume 5, p. 771.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 772.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 772.
87. These themes are explicitly developed in Hegel's *Fragmente über Volksreligion und Christentum* (1793–4) and also in *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1796 or 1797). The authorship of the latter piece is still a matter of scholarly dispute, as summarized on pp. 48–49 of H. Zeltner, *Schelling Forschung seit 1954*, Darmstadt, 1975. Whether or not Schelling wrote the *ältestes Systemprogramm*, one can ascribe an interest in these three tasks of religion to him as well as to Hegel, although his own awareness of political questions in particular always remained negligible. Schelling's first work was a study of mythology, the essay *Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt* (1793) and mythology was the chief theme of the *Systemprogramm*. (See F.G. Nauen, *Revolution, Idealism and Human Freedom. Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel and the Crisis of Early German Idealism*. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1971.)
88. *Schellings Werke*, volume 6, 712.
89. *Schelling and Revelation: Critique of the latest attempt of reaction against the free philosophy*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975), volume 2, p. 207.
90. *Telegraph für Deutschland*, No. 207, December 1841, in *M.E.C.W.*, vol. 2, p. 186.
91. *Schelling and Revelation*, p. 211.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
95. Letter to Feuerbach, 3/10/1843, in L. Feuerbach, *Briefwechsel*, (Leipzig, Reclam, 1963), p. 179.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
97. Letter to Marx, 25/10/1843, *Briefwechsel*, p. 182.
98. L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, (3rd Edition 1849, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1974), p. 160.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 155–157.
100. 6th *Ergänzungsband*, p. 381.
101. A summary of Schelling's system of myth, as interpreted through the *Potenzienlehre*, is on pp. 382–410, 6th *Ergänzungsband*.
102. K.O. Müller, *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*, (English translation 1844), p. 158.
103. For K. Jaspers, in his *Schelling: Grösse und Verhängnis* (München, 1955), the stimulating and profound questions that Schelling asked were rarely complemented by rigorous philosophical execution: 'Where have we got to with Schel-

ling's questions? From the sovereignty of a great philosophical quest, from a stance on the frontiers of thought, to the murky and restricted domains of gnosis, which claims an objective knowledge of the transcendent, and thus of being itself, through contemplation and story and which experiences this knowledge as the salvation of the soul' (p. 130). 'What he lacked is shown by Kierkegaard and Marx, by the reality of the sciences, by the political thought and events of his day. Schelling is blind to all of these, remaining ignorant in his apparently illuminating declarations, since he does not penetrate to reality itself' (p. 253).

104. Quoted in W. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Harper Torchbooks, 1962), volume 1, p. 234.
105. W. Schulz, in his *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, considers Schelling's *Potenzenlehre* to be an essentially idealist doctrine, not offering any justification for classifying him as an existentialist *avant la lettre*. For Schulz, Schelling's late philosophy had much more in common with Hegel than with his critics of the 1840's: Schelling's critique of Hegel's absolute idealism was an intra-idealist critique, aimed at a successful interpretation of the relationship between God and reason. For Schulz, Schelling did not attempt to set up a polarity of reason and existence, reason and nature, in a way similar to the thought of Kierkegaard or Feuerbach: he did not intend to criticize idealism 'from the side of life', but to correct it by stressing the absolute self-possession of God and the consequent relativity of human reason. '... to presuppose God as the existing subject of reason. He is the real power which stands above reason as its possibility, and thought must be subordinated, subjected, down-cast (*unterworfen*) before him. Before God, knowledge is non-being.' Schulz emphasizes that for Schelling 'God is not real in a sphere of reality which has nothing to do with reason, but rather reason is the locus of God ... God is the transcendent made into the content of reason. The more one attempts to understand the whole of Schelling's late philosophy, the more indubitable it becomes that we are dealing here with an idealist system'. (pp. 89–90). Yet Schelling does, for Schulz, emphasize the finitude of human subjectivity and of human reason, which are grounded in an act of divine existence: 'The "that" of unintelligibility separates God, who is pure self-mediation, from reason, since it relates them to each other as opposites. If this "that" was not put between them, then God would fall back into reason: we would be back with the pantheism of Hegel.' (p. 289) It was this emphasis on the dependence of rational subjectivity on a non-rational ground, for Schulz, which was to be developed by Kierkegaard and Heidegger.
106. For K. Löwith, in his *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (Constable, London, 1965), 'In Schelling, the problem of being in the anti-Hegelian movement arrived at the point where Heidegger once more took it up. For who could deny that the 'facticity' of *Dasein*, which lies in the brute fact of *Dass-Sein*, that *Geworfenheit* and *Entwurf* correspond to 'immediate existence' and 'breaking away' from this necessary accident? The difference with Schelling lies in the fact that Heidegger erects upon Kierkegaard's basis a 'system of existence' (*Dasein*) which lacks Schelling's tension between the negative and positive philosophy of 'reason' and 'existence'. (p. 118)
107. For J. Habermas, in his 'Dialektischer Idealismus im Übergang zum Materialismus – Geschichtsphilosophische Folgerungen aus Schellings Idee einer Contraction Gottes' in *Theorie und Praxis* (Luchterhand, Neuwied am Rhein and Berlin, 1963), Schelling's granting of a relative cognitive status to 'negative' philosophy meant that he could never convincingly demonstrate 'positive' philosophy's superiority to it: if 'negative' philosophy was something more than subjective idealism, then it could not be said to be unable to grasp existence, to unite essence and existence. It was Kierkegaard who saw much more clearly that 'the claim of posi-



tive philosophy had to be ratified by a relinquishing of negative philosophy'. For Habermas, Schelling's late philosophy was the first attempt at an existentialist critique of idealism, which was developed by Kierkegaard and completed by Heidegger: 'It was Heidegger who first achieved what Schelling thought he had reached by splitting the system: the unity of the ontological question with the practical need for a reversal of the corrupt age . . . In this conviction, that the devoted knowledge of being and the evocation of salvation are a unity, idealism still lives within the overcoming of idealism. This bifurcation has been inherited from Schelling by contemporary philosophy.' (p. 149)

## Chapter 5 — Individualism and religious transcendence in Kierkegaard's thought

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1. J. Collins, in his *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (London, 1954), notes that Kierkegaard made a real attempt to keep abreast of intellectual events in Germany, and to acquire a first hand knowledge of Hegel, but that his familiarity with Hegel was less than that he had with the Danish Hegelians, and his attacks on Hegel were generally made through the prism of the presentation of Hegelian thought in Marheineke and Martensen, the Danish Professor of Theology and later Bishop. For Collins, 'Kierkegaard was not interested in the fine shades of meaning and the purely technical points in Hegel. He studied Hegel as one studies the *fons et origo* of a broad intellectual and social movement.' (p. 105)
2. M.C. Taylor's *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton, 1975) has an extended discussion of the meaning of the various 'stages of existence' analysed by Kierkegaard. On the general characteristics of the 'reflective aesthetical' stage, see pp. 178–182.
3. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton, 1968), p. 119.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
17. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, 1968, published together with *The Sickness unto Death*), p. 78.
18. *The Concept of Dread* (Princeton, 1967), p. 15.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
22. *Postscript*, p. 496.
23. *Training in Christianity* (Princeton, 1967), p. 9.
24. *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, 1967), p. 76.
25. *Training in Christianity*, p. 26.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
30. For H. Diem, in his *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence* (London, 1959), the object of Kierkegaard's work was not to develop an anthropology but to 'work out the decisively Christian existential categories as distinct from existential understanding proper to philosophies of ethical and religious immanence'. (p. 81) In doing this 'Kierkegaard does not persuade for Christianity but desires to seek out the natural man and to help in the task of existence.' (p. 53) The dialectical quality of Kierkegaard's work proceeds from his concern to find a lived solution to human existence, the conclusion of stages of struggle and hardship, rather than a philosophical anthropology.
31. For M.C. Taylor, in his *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, *op. cit.*, man's maturation through the stages, aesthetic, ethical and 'religion A', or deism, involves a corresponding increase in the importance and relevance of the ideas of the self and of time: this reaches its climax in the incarnation, when the fully developed individual responds in the instant of faith to the individual Jesus who makes himself known in the instant of the Incarnation. See especially p. 335.
32. *The Concept of Dread*, p. 81.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
36. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 75.
37. *Postscript*, p. 507.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 496.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
40. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 13.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
47. *Postscript*, p. 59.
48. These issues are dealt with at length in N. Thulstrup's *Introduction* to the *Princeton*, 1967 edition of the *Philosophical Fragments*.
49. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 128.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
52. *Training in Christianity*, p. 204.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
54. *Training in Christianity*, p. 216.
55. *Postscript*, p. 116.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 492.
58. *Training in Christianity*, p. 226.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
63. *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 16–23.

64. *The Concept of Dread*, p. 98.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
66. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 96.
67. *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, pp. 7–12.
68. *Postscript*, p. 92.
69. *Training in Christianity*, p. 86.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
74. *Postscript*, p. 116.
75. *Training in Christianity*, p. 114.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
80. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 50.
81. *Training in Christianity*, pp. 208–9.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
83. Hegel, *Theorie Werkausgabe*, Frankfurt, 1971, vol. 17, p. 331.
84. The problem of Christendom in the thought of Hegel and Kierkegaard is well treated in S. Crites's *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (American Academy of Religion, AAR Studies in Religion No. 2). For Crites, Hegel is preeminently the philosopher of Christendom, of a world where religious values, once transcendent and distinct from secular life, have succeeded in permeating and transforming the world, finally accepting the validity of the secular world as an independent realm, so that the barrier between faith and human culture is overcome. In this sense, Hegel may be accurately described as the philosopher of Christendom, but if Christendom is understood in the Romantic sense of a civilization owing all its cultural vitality and social order to strong ecclesiastical institutions, then Hegel must be considered to be its critic. Hegel and Kierkegaard were at one in their rejection of any official union of Church and state, but, as Crites rightly argues, at odds in their attitudes to the possibility of a union of Christian faith and the secular world.
85. *Training in Christianity*, p. 218.
86. The idea of Christ as the forgiver of sins always retained enormous significance for Kierkegaard, fundamentally because of his unwillingness to believe – until his 'Easter experience' of 1848 – that his own sins and the sins of his father had been forgiven. His final conviction of Christ's forgiveness is recorded in his *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1851) (printed with *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself* in W. Lowrie's translation, Princeton edition). These discourses are, for G. Malantschuk, in his *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton, 1974), the 'fulcrum of Kierkegaard's authorship', since 'in all his dialectical and existential presentations Kierkegaard always considers the doctrine of grace to be the ultimate and most central doctrine. His own existential experiences had fully taught him how little a man can accomplish'. (p. 355) The increasing emphasis on 'Christ the pattern' may perhaps be explained – apart from its link to Christian militancy – by its simplicity, its relationship to contemporaneity. Even the doctrine of the atonement, at least in its articulated forms, is the product of the work of human reason, and uses various concepts that also have relevance in secular culture. As such it is already a product of the '1,800 years'. 'Christ the pattern', by contrast, is the most immediate form of contemporaneous discipleship.

87. Diem, *op. cit.*, p. 148; W. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, New York, 1962, vol. 2, pp. 504–523.
88. *Attack upon 'Christendom'* (Princeton, 1968), p. 5.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
91. For Crites, *op. cit.*, the understanding of marriage is a key to the opposition of Hegel and Kierkegaard, since it represents the possibility of a union of secular ethics and sacramental grace. 'For Hegel the marriage ceremony might be said to reveal what is genuinely sacred in the Christian tradition, the authentic distillate remaining after the history of Christendom had purged Christianity of spurious notions of sacredness. For Kierkegaard, who thought marriage had its validity as a social or ethical institution, the elevation of the ceremony to a Christian means of grace was a sign of Christendom's apostasy.' (p. 20).
92. *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, p. 34.
93. *Postscript*, p. 423.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 423.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
96. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 78.
97. *Postscript*, p. 416.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
99. 'In the great moment of resignation he had had no thought of mediation, but committed himself by a choice, and it is now similarly his task to acquire the requisite facility in the renewal of this choice, and in giving it existential expression. The individual does indeed remain in the finite, where he confronts the difficulty of maintaining himself in the absolute choice while still living in the finite, but just as he deprived the finite of its unchecked validity in the moment of resignation, so it remains his task to reinstate repeatedly the determination by which this was first accomplished. Let the world give him everything, it is possible that he will see fit to accept it. But he says 'Oh, well' and this 'Oh, well' means the absolute respect for the absolute *telos*.' (*Postscript*, p. 367) This citation expresses the possibility of living in the presence of the absolute while simultaneously accepting the relative status of secular reality. The power of the infinite is here not exerted as a transforming force upon relative reality. In *Training in Christianity* (1850) and *Attack upon 'Christendom'* (the collection of Kierkegaard's polemical articles of 1855, edited and translated by W. Lowrie) by contrast, the idea of a witness to the absolute, involving suffering at the hands of the world, eradicates the previous distinction of relative and absolute, since allegiance to the absolute now dictates the forms of inner worldly behaviour. In the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard affirmed of the man of faith, 'in view of the fact that true religiosity is that of the secret inwardness, he dares not express his religiosity outwardly, because this would infect it with worldliness' (p. 454), while in the *Attack* he insists that 'the Christianity of the New Testament is: in the fear of God to suffer for the doctrine at the hands of men' (p. 124), and 'the concept Christian is a polemical concept, one can only be a Christian in contrast or contrastedly'. (p. 127) This significant change derives not so much from Kierkegaard's abandonment of his original distinction, since he did maintain it to the end in his understanding of the distinctiveness of Christian equality from social equality, but because the relative had threatened to deprive Christianity of its absolute reference point.
100. *Attack upon Christendom*, p. 39.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
107. Thus Kierkegaard saw himself, even as late as 1851, in the Preface to *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (in *For Self-examination and Judge for Yourself*, Princeton, 1944) as an interpreter of human existence: the author 'does not by any means call himself a witness to the truth, but only a peculiar sort of poet and thinker, who 'without authority', has nothing new to bring but would read the fundamental document of the individual, humane existence-relationship, the old, well-known, from the fathers handed down — would read it through once again, if possible in a more heartfelt way'. Kierkegaard's attempt to make a thorough analysis of the stages of human existence represents the content of any 'system' in his thought. For Malantschuk, *op. cit.*, p. 359, 'Although the idea that Kierkegaard had created a "system" must be rejected, one should be continually aware that an account of a progressive movement which with the help of a qualitative dialectic poses ever more decisive contrasts, placing a person in the tension of choice and final decision, does give us a coherent survey of existence. It is this coherence that Kierkegaard had in mind and expected people to look for in his authorship.'
108. *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, p. 141.
109. For P. Sponheim, in his *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (London, 1968) the idea of Christianity as the conclusion of a dialectic of existence must imply some continuity with the earlier stages, which would render Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian existence less 'transcendent' than it is interpreted to be in this study. 'If we wish to say that the development in Kierkegaard's thought is not crowned until the transcendent categories of Religion B are reached, we are yet saying that Religion B is reached within a process of development. That fact would suggest that Religion B itself is not fully characterized by a single-minded attention to the dimension of transcendence.' (p. 35) 'It seems more correct to see Kierkegaard's conception of the Christian's passion as the fulfilment rather than the repudiation of his understanding of the nature of the human spirit set in existence.' (p. 38).
110. *Attack upon Christendom*, p. 185.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
112. For H. Diem, *op. cit.*, 'The dialectic of Kierkegaard does not stand in opposition to the authoritative proclamation of the Church, but is dialectically related to the latter.' (p. 98) 'The preaching of the Gospel must in various ways be clothed with an authority in which the authority of the Church is expressed. To this extent, even for Kierkegaard, there can be no individual faith apart from the Church.' (p. 108)
113. As Kierkegaard wrote in the *Philosophical Fragments*: 'If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: 'We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died'', it would be more than enough.' (p. 130).
114. *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, p. 211.
115. Bauer, *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit*, p. 220.
116. *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, p. 226.
117. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
118. *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* (Oxford, 1939), p. 60.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
120. *Works of Love* (Princeton, 1946), p. 94.
121. *Point of View*, p. 113.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
124. *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, (Oxford, 1940), p. 27.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 66–67.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
136. *Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*, (published together with *The Present Age*, translated by A. Dru, Collins, 1962), p. 105.
137. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
140. *Postscript*, p. 548.
141. *The Point of View*, p. 163.
142. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9.
143. *Works of Love*, p. 56.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
145. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
146. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
147. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
149. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
150. *The Point of View*, p. 18.
151. *Works of Love*, p. 95.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
154. Just as ethics can exist only if faith is posited, so, for Kierkegaard, any ‘humanism’ is possible only as the consequence of faith’s insight into the equality of all before God: ‘The religious is the transfigured rendering of that which the politician has thought in his happiest moment, if so be that he truly loves what it is to be a man . . . It is only religion that can, with the help of eternity, carry human equality to the utmost limit – the godly, the essential, the non-worldly, the true, the only possible human equality. And therefore be it said to its honour and glory, religion is the true humanity.’ (*The Point of View*, p. 109.)

## Chapter 6 — Conclusion

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1. For K. Löwith, in his *Meaning in History* (University of Chicago Press, 1949), Hegel is the ‘last philosopher of history because he is the last philosopher whose immense historical sense was still restrained and disciplined by the Christian tradition . . . Hegel believed himself loyal to the genius of Christianity by realizing the

Kingdom of God on earth'. (57) Yet Löwith insists on the 'inherent weakness of his principle that the Christian religion is realized by reason in the history of the secular world – as if the Christian faith could ever be 'realized' at all and yet remain a faith in things unseen.' (58) For Löwith 'Christianity was thrown into the vortex of the world's history only willy-nilly; and only as a secularized and rationalized principle can God's providential purpose by worked out into a consistent system . . . In the Christian view, history is of decisive importance only in so far as God has revealed himself in a historical man' – an interpretation similar to Kierkegaard's doctrine of the 'instant'. (p. 193). Löwith is critical of Hegel's attempt to secularize Christian eschatology just as he considers the Young Hegelians to be essentially destructive and superficial ideologues because they attempted to 'realize' philosophy in social *praxis*: 'The Left Hegelians do still call themselves philosophers, but they are no longer lovers of wisdom and self-sufficient insight. They no longer believe in philosophical *theoria* as the highest, because it is the most free, human activity and its foundation in the "need of needlessness"'. (*Hegelsche Linke*, Stuttgart, 1962, pp. 9–10) In his *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, Löwith understood the antinomies of Marx and Kierkegaard as the destruction of the bourgeois-Christian world, whose faith had already been threatened by Hegel's secularization of Christianity. By Löwith's definition, Hegel himself was not a philosopher, since his system arose not from the 'need of needlessness' but from the experience of the existential tension between faith and modern secularity.

2. *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, pp. 81–82.
3. Hegel's fear that the structure of the *Rechtsstaat* would be broken down by the process of industrialization and the accompanying social polarization was fully validated by the 1840's. For R. Koselleck, in his 'Staat und Gesellschaft in Preussen 1815–1848' (in *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. H.-U. Wehler, Kiepenheuer und Witsch, Neue Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek, 1966) 'through the liberation of all individuals from the bonds of the "castes", as the estates were called by the reformers, a society that was economically free but politically bound to the state was to emerge, whose rights, including rights of representation, were to be laid down in a constitution after the completion of the work of reform'. (p. 61) In the years before 1848, however, the break-down of the traditional guilds under the impact of the liberal economy that the reformers had encouraged led to widespread destitution, 'the social obverse of the economic progress'. (p. 74) Only after 1848 did economic liberalism and industrialization begin to bring prosperity. T. Hamerow, in his *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction. Economics and Politics in Germany 1815–1871* (Princeton University Press, 1958) Part I, 5, emphasizes the havoc wrought in the guild crafts by industrialization and the starvation caused by a succession of famines as the most striking social characteristics of the 1840's. It was the revolt of the hungry and unemployed masses that finally gave liberal constitutionalism the means to attack the Restoration state. Both Hamerow and W. Conze in his 'Vom Pöbel zum Proletariat' (in Wehler, *op. cit.*) emphasize that it was the unemployed guildsmen, rather than the industrial proletariat, who suffered most during this period.
4. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 46.
5. The idealist notion of theogony, which understood God's life as evolving in its relationship to the world through three epochs represented by the three persons of the trinity, corresponded to the understanding of human history and civilization as undergoing a three-stage dialectic which was characteristic of this period of thought. For H. Popitz, in his *Der entfremdete Mensch* (Basel, 1953), the eschatological temper of German thought from Schiller to Marx was related to

this three-stage dialectic, which saw the alienated present as the antithesis necessary to a future resolution: 'not only through the specifically historical orientation, but equally through the awakening of a new consciousness of the problem, which experiences the future as a task, as the demand of a tomorrow which must be shaped today, does the present time win a marked and unique plasticity.' (p. 13)

6. For Ruge, the *Weltgeist* became the *Zeitgeist*, the leading ideas of the age. Since the *Weltgeist* did not assure the victory of reason and freedom, their hegemony over romanticism and Christian orthodoxy could only be effected by their energetic dissemination and forceful espousal – hence his own editorship of the *Hallische* and *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. The popularization of radical ideas through journalism was the most important aspect of the 'practical-critical' action recommended by the followers of Feuerbach.
7. *Philosophy of Right* (Knox), p. 12.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 91.



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